



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



TUESDAY — 17 JAN 2023

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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/17 A better Covid winter
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/briefing/covid-infections.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=US%20News">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/briefing/covid-infections.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=US%20News</a>
GIST	<p>Some of the worst days of Covid in the U.S. have come as winters have settled in, and surges led hospitals to overflow and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths.</p> <p>A comparable surge has yet to materialize on a similar timeline this winter. By now, hospitalizations in particular would have started to sharply rise. Instead, data suggests that more of a Covid bump than a surge has emerged. Recent hospitalization figures are much lower than the past, largest surges....</p> <p>There is some geographic variation. Covid hospitalizations have risen more quickly in the Northeast and South in recent weeks, potentially driven by <a href="#">a new Omicron subvariant</a>. But even there, hospitalization levels are closer to the summer increase caused by the Delta variant in 2021 than to the following winter surge caused by the Omicron variant.</p> <p>Some Western states are reporting among their lowest hospitalization rates since the pandemic began.</p> <p>After years of winter surges, the absence of one translates to potentially tens of thousands fewer deaths and is worth celebrating, even if it ends up being a temporary reprieve. Today's newsletter will look at the lack of a winter surge so far and what that means for Covid's future.</p> <p><b>Population immunity</b></p> <p>Why have we avoided the typical winter surge? Because the U.S. population has, collectively, built up immunity to the virus. Much of that is thanks to vaccines and boosters. But repeated exposure to the virus and infections have played a significant role, too.</p> <p>Anecdotal, experts and others still report a lot of sickness around them — but not hospitalizations or deaths. This is the outcome you would expect to see with Covid in a population with higher levels of immunity: Vaccines and past infection seem to offer strong protection from the worst outcomes of the virus, but they don't fully prevent infection and milder disease.</p> <p>“What you're seeing is a transition to ongoing transmission but much milder infections,” said Dr. Céline Gounder, a senior fellow at the Kaiser Family Foundation.</p> <p>People's actions may have suppressed a winter surge, too. In the fall, experts and news outlets warned of a possible simultaneous surge of <a href="#">Covid, flu and R.S.V.</a> Some Americans may have responded by behaving more cautiously — for example, by wearing masks in public and avoiding larger gatherings. But those behavior changes are not widespread, certainly not to the levels of 2020.</p> <p>An important caveat to all of this: The data is messy. Covid case totals in particular are unreliable because fewer people are testing and reporting results.</p> <p>Even the counts for hospitalizations and deaths are less accurate than they once were. For example, someone may show up to the hospital for an issue unrelated to Covid, test positive for the virus and get marked down as a Covid hospitalization. Massachusetts officials <a href="#">estimate</a> that only about one-third of people hospitalized with Covid are actually there for Covid-related illness.</p>

But that phenomenon indicates that Covid hospitalizations are overcounted, which would mean that, if anything, the data overstates the size of the current bump.

It amounts to a victory for public health: Vaccines have managed to tame Covid, relative to 2020 and 2021.

### **Future risks**

The good news does not mean that Covid is now a concern of the past.

Older and immunocompromised people are still at significant risk. [More than 90 percent](#) of deaths are now among Americans 65 and older. Hospitalizations are nearly five times higher among Americans 70 and older than among Americans of all ages.

If public health interventions helped tame Covid this winter, then relaxing too much could lead to a surge. But experts aren't envisioning a return to 2020-style lockdowns or constant masking and testing.

Their recommendations are less demanding: Get boosters, isolate when sick and mask in indoor public spaces if the virus is quickly spreading. And [medications like Paxlovid](#) should be available for those who are sick. (They aren't currently available enough because doctors are still too reluctant to prescribe Paxlovid, especially to older patients, experts warned. I'll write about that issue in a future newsletter.)

"We've made progress. We are getting ahead of this. People know what to do," said Saskia Popescu, an epidemiologist at George Mason University. "But it worries me, because people also use that progress as an excuse to not be as vigilant and not take it so seriously."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/17 Calif. faces 9<sup>th</sup> 'river' series of major storms</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/last-in-series-of-california-storms-dumps-more-rain-snow/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/last-in-series-of-california-storms-dumps-more-rain-snow/</a>
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES (AP) — The ninth atmospheric river in a three-week series of major winter storms was churning through California on Monday, leaving mountain driving dangerous and the flooding risk high near swollen rivers even as the sun came out in some areas.</p> <p>Heavy snow fell across the Sierra Nevada and the National Weather Service discouraged travel. Interstate 80, a key highway from the San Francisco Bay Area to Lake Tahoe ski resorts, reopened with chain requirements after periodic weekend closures because of whiteout conditions.</p> <p>"If you must travel, be prepared for dangerous travel conditions, significant travel delays and road closures," the weather service office in Sacramento said on Twitter.</p> <p>The University of California Berkeley Central Sierra Snow Lab tweeted Monday morning that it had recorded 49.6 inches (126 cm) of new snow since Friday.</p> <p>A backcountry avalanche warning was issued for the central Sierra, including the greater Tahoe area.</p> <p>A barrage of atmospheric river storms has dumped rain and snow on California since late December, cutting power to thousands, swamping roads, toppling trees, unleashing debris flows and triggering landslides. Monday's system was relatively weak compared with earlier storms, but flooding and mudslide risks remained because the state was so saturated, forecasters said.</p> <p>President Joe Biden will travel to California's central coast Thursday to visit areas that have been impacted by the extreme weather. The White House said in a statement Monday that the president would visit with first responders and state and local officials, survey recovery efforts and assess what additional federal support is needed.</p>

Mostly dry days were in the week's forecast, though some parts of Northern California could see more rain at midweek.

The sun came out Monday in San Francisco, where 20.3 inches (51.5 cm) of rain has fallen at the city's airport since Oct. 1, when California typically begins recording rainfall for the year. The average for the "water year" is 19.6 inches (49.8 cm), "so we've surpassed the yearly total with 8 more months to go," the San Francisco weather service office tweeted.

Across the bay in Berkeley, 10 homes were evacuated Monday when a sodden hillside collapsed, sending mud onto properties. No injuries were reported.

Up to 2 more inches (5 cm) of rain fell Sunday in the soaked Sacramento Valley, where residents of Wilton and surrounding communities were warned to prepare to leave if the Cosumnes River rose further.

In Monterey County, the swollen Salinas River swamped farmland over the weekend and officials said Monday that it was still rising. To the east, flood warnings were still in effect for Merced County in the agricultural Central Valley, where Gov. Gavin Newsom visited Saturday.

Newsom on Monday signed an executive order to further bolster the state's emergency storm response and help communities that suffered damage. President Joe Biden declared a major disaster in the state and ordered federal aid to supplement local recovery efforts.

In Southern California, the sun shone in Los Angeles, but winter storm warnings and advisories were still in place for mountain areas, where many roads remained impassable because of mud and rock slides. Two northbound lanes of Interstate 5 near Castaic in northern LA County were closed indefinitely after a hillside collapsed.

Downtown Los Angeles set a rainfall record Saturday with 1.82 inches (4.6 cm), the weather service said.

At least 20 storm-related deaths have occurred, and a 5-year-old boy remained missing after being swept out of his mother's car by floodwaters in San Luis Obispo County.

Forecasters were keeping their eyes on a storm forming in the Pacific to see if it gains enough strength to become the state's 10th atmospheric river of the season. Either way it is likely to only bring light rain and will be confined mostly to Northern California when it makes landfall Wednesday, state climatologist Dr. Mike Anderson said Monday during a state weather briefing.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/17 UN: 7,000+ civilians killed war in Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/17/Ukraine-Russian-war-civilian-death-toll/2641673942302/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/17/Ukraine-Russian-war-civilian-death-toll/2641673942302/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 17 (UPI) -- More than 7,000 civilians have died from war in Ukraine, the United Nations human rights office said, as the conflict instigated by Russia nears its one-year anniversary.</p> <p>The bloody war in Ukraine began Feb. 24 when Russia invaded its neighbor, resulting in 18,358 civilian casualties, including 7,031 deaths and 11,327 people being injured, the office the for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a statement Monday.</p> <p>Of the total civilian deaths, 2,472 were men, 1,764 were women and nearly 2,000 were labeled as adults whose sex was unknown. Minors accounted for more than 400 deaths, including 221 boys, 177 girls and 35 children, the office said.</p> <p>"Most of the civilian casualties recorded were caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects, including shelling from heavy artillery, multiple launch rocket systems missiles and air strikes," the OHCHR said.</p>

	<p>The numbers presented by OHCHR are those it was able to tally, with officials stating they believe the actual civilian figures "are considerably higher" as retrieving information from areas of intense fighting has been delayed while other reports are pending confirmation.</p> <p>Areas where information has been affected include Mariupol, Iziun and others where there have been allegations of numerous civilian casualties, it said.</p> <p>The office added that the vast majority of the deaths occurred in Kyiv-controlled areas of the country, with only 495 civilians having been killed in Ukrainian territory under the Russian armed forces.</p> <p>So far this year, there have been 104 civilian deaths in Ukraine with another 284 people have been injured, it said, adding that 97% of the casualties were the result of explosive weapons. The remaining 3% were caused by mines and explosive remnants of war, it said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/17 Ukraine civilians languish in Russia prisons</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-donetsk-business-prisons-59837e2f8006bfd1dc3347522e87efc5?utm_source=homepage&amp;utm_medium=TopNews&amp;utm_campaign=position_01">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-donetsk-business-prisons-59837e2f8006bfd1dc3347522e87efc5?utm_source=homepage&amp;utm_medium=TopNews&amp;utm_campaign=position_01</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Alina Kapatsyna often dreams about getting a phone call from her mother. In those visions, her mother tells her that she’s coming home.</p> <p>Men in military uniforms took 45-year-old Vita Hannych away from her house in eastern Ukraine in April. She never returned.</p> <p>Her family later learned that Hannych, who has long suffered from seizures because of a brain cyst, is in custody in the Russian-occupied part of the Donetsk region.</p> <p>Kapatsyna told The Associated Press that it remains unclear why her mother — ”a peaceful, civilian and sick person” who has never held a weapon — was detained.</p> <p>Hannych is one of many Ukrainian noncombatants being held by Russian forces for months following their invasion.</p> <p>Some are deemed to be prisoners of war, even though they never took part in the fighting. Others are in a sort of legal limbo — not facing any criminal charges or considered to be POWs. Ukrainian estimates of how many there are range from hundreds to many thousands.</p> <p>Hannych was wearing only a sweatsuit and slippers when she was seized by Russian forces occupying her village of Volodymyrivka several weeks into the Feb. 24 invasion. It is still under Moscow’s control.</p> <p>Her family initially thought she would come home shortly. Russian forces were known to detain people for two or three days for “filtration” and then release them, Kapatsyna said, and Hannych had no military or law enforcement connections.</p> <p>When she wasn’t released, Kapatsyna and her 64-year-old grandmother started a search. At first, letters and visits to various Russian-installed officials and government bodies in the Donetsk region yielded no results.</p> <p>“The answers from everywhere were the same: ‘We did not take her away.’ Who took her then, if no one took her?” said Kapatsyna, who left the village in March for the Ukrainian-controlled city of Dnipro.</p> <p>Then, they finally got some clarity: Hannych was jailed in Olenivka, another Russian-controlled city, according to a letter from the Moscow-installed prosecutor’s office in the Donetsk region.</p>

The jail staff told Kapatsyna's grandmother that Hannych was a sniper, allegations her family deems absurd, given her condition. Medical records seen by the AP confirmed that she had a brain cyst, as well as "residual encephalopathy" and "general convulsive attacks."

Anna Vorosheva, who spent 100 days in the same facility as Hannych, recounted squalid, inhumane conditions: putrid drinking water, no heat or showers, having to sleep in shifts and hearing new prisoners screaming from being beaten.

Vorosheva, 46, said she wasn't told why she was detained, aside from "smirks and jokes about Nazis" — a reference to Russia's false claims that what it calls its "special military operation" was a campaign to "denazify" Ukraine. She also said the staff told her: "Be happy we're not beating you."

Donetsk authorities labeled Hannych a POW and recently told the family she is imprisoned in the occupied city of Mariupol. It remains unclear when, if at all, she could be released.

Ukraine's top human rights organization, Center for Civil Liberties, has requests concerning around 900 civilians captured by Russia since the war began, with more than half still in custody.

Dmytro Lubinets, Ukraine's human rights envoy, put the number even higher and said Friday that his office received inquiries concerning more than 20,000 "civilian hostages" detained by Russia.

Russian lawyer Leonid Solovyov told the AP he has amassed more than 100 requests concerning Ukrainian civilians. He said he was able to help 30-40 confirm the person they looked for was in Russian custody without any legal status — just like his client, Mykyta Shkriabin.

The student from northeastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region was detained by Russia's military in March and has been held ever since without charges or any legal proceedings.

Shkriabin, then 19, was sheltering from the fighting in a basement with his family, according to his mother, Tetiana. During a break, he went out for supplies — and never returned.

Tetiana Shkriabina told the AP that she learned from witnesses that Russian soldiers seized him.

Months later, Solovyov got confirmation from Russia's Defense Ministry that Shkriabin was detained for "resisting the special military operation." There is no such offense on the books in Russia, Solovyov said, and even if there was, Shkriabin would have been formally charged and investigated, but that hasn't happened. The ministry refused to disclose his whereabouts.

Moreover, when Solovyov filed a complaint to Russia's Investigative Committee contesting the detention, it confirmed that there are no criminal probes opened against Shkriabin, that he is neither a suspect, nor an accused.

Shkriabin, who turned 20 in captivity, hasn't been labeled a POW, the lawyer said, adding: "His legal status is simply a hostage."

Russia's Defense Ministry and the Interior Ministry didn't respond to requests for comment.

Other cases are eerily similar to those of Shkriabin and Hannych.

In May, Russian forces detained information technology specialist Iryna Horobtsova in the southern city of Kherson when it was occupied by Moscow. They raided her apartment, seizing a laptop, two cellphones and several flash drives, and then took her away, according to her sister, Elena Kornii. They promised her parents that she would be home that evening — but it didn't happen.



Horobtsova remained in the city and spoke out against the war on social media before she was detained, Kornii said. She had attended anti-Russia protests and also helped residents by driving them to work or finding scarce medications.

“She hasn’t violated any Ukrainian laws,” Kornii said, noting that her sister had nothing to do with the military.

Horobtsova’s lawyer, Emil Kurbedinov, said he believed that Russian security forces were carrying out “purges of the disloyal” in Kherson.

He learned from Russia’s Federal Security Service, or FSB, that she was still in custody. The Interior Ministry in Moscow-annexed Crimea told him that Horobtsova was in a detention center there. When Kurbedinov tried to visit her, officials refused to acknowledge having any such prisoner.

As for why she was held, the lawyer said authorities told him that “she resisted the special military operation, and a decision regarding her will be made when the special military operation is over.”

He described her as “unlawfully imprisoned.”

Dmytro Orlov, mayor of the occupied city of Enerhodar in the Zaporizhzhia region, describes the fate of his deputy the same way — “an absolutely arbitrary detention.”

Ivan Samoydyuk was picked up by Russian soldiers shortly after they seized the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in March, and no charges have been filed against him, Orlov said.

“We’re not even sure if he’s alive!” the mayor said. “If we can’t get clarity from the Russians about the fate of a deputy mayor, imagine the fate of ordinary Ukrainian civilians.”

Mykhailo Savva of the Expert Council of the Center for Civil Liberties said the Geneva Conventions allow a state to detain civilians temporarily in occupied areas, but “as soon as the reason that caused the detention of this civilian disappears, then this person must be released.”

“No special conditions, no trades, just release,” Savva said, noting that civilians can’t be declared POWs under international law.

International law prohibits a warring party from forcibly moving a civilian to its own territory or territory it occupies, and doing so could be deemed a war crime, said Yulia Gorbunova, a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch.

POWs can be exchanged, but there is no legal mechanism for swapping noncombatants, Gorbunova said, complicating efforts to free civilians from captivity.

Since the war began, however, Kyiv has been able to bring some home. Andriy Yermak, the head of Ukraine’s presidential office, said on Jan. 8 that 132 civilians were brought back from Russian captivity in 2022.

Lubinet, the Ukrainian human rights ombudsman, met this month with his Russian counterpart, Tatyana Moskalkova.

He said he gave Moskalkova lists of some of the 20,000 Ukrainian civilians he said were held by Russia, and “the Russian side agreed to find out where they are, in what condition and why they are being held.”

After getting such information, the question “of the procedure for their return” will be raised, Lubinet said.

HEADLINE	01/16 Steep plunge in used car prices
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/business/used-car-prices/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/business/used-car-prices/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>New York</b>CNN — Tracking used car prices is enough to give anyone whiplash.</p> <p>Since the start of the pandemic and the resulting disruptions to new car supply chains first sent prices soaring, <a href="#">used car prices</a> posted their largest annual increase on record – up 45% in the 12 months ending in June 2021, according to the Consumer Price Index – before swinging to a 12-month drop of 8.8% in the most recent reading for December.</p> <p>That was the biggest 12-month plunge in prices for used cars since June 2009, when General Motors and Chrysler were both in <a href="#">bankruptcy</a> proceedings and the economy was hemorrhaging a <a href="#">half-million jobs a month</a>.</p> <p>“It was a completely wild ride,” said Ivan Drury, director of insights at Edmunds.com Inc., an online resources for inventory and information on cars.</p> <p>Data from Edmunds shows the average price of a used car purchase in December at \$29,533, down nearly \$1,600 from the record high of \$31,095 reached in April 2022. Today’s average used car price is about the same as the average new car price as recently as 2010.</p> <p>While the prices of late model used cars are down only 5% off their peak according according to Edmunds, the price of older used cars, those five years or older, have fallen 15% or more from their peaks early in 2022.</p> <p>Experts say reasons for the decline include <a href="#">higher interest rates</a> that make it more expensive to finance a car purchase, limiting demand. CarMax (<a href="#">KMX</a>), the nation’s largest pure used car dealer, has warned that the combination of high prices and high interest rates is creating an <a href="#">affordability problem</a> for many buyers, hurting overall demand.</p> <p><b>Increased inventory pushing down prices</b></p> <p>But the leading reason for the drop in used car prices is the increased supply of new cars.</p> <p>It was the lack of new car inventory that drove up prices. Parts shortages, especially for <a href="#">computer chips</a>, had choked off production of new cars in much of 2022, causing the <a href="#">lowest level of full-year US new car</a> sales since 2011.</p> <p>The low supply of new cars caused an even bigger jump in the average price of used cars, as buyers who would otherwise buy new vehicles turned to the used car market.</p> <p>“At one point it seemed that everyone who was going to buy new ended up buying used,” said Greg Markus, executive vice president of AutoLenders, parent company of New Jersey’s largest used car dealership chain.</p> <p>That included rental car companies, which before the pandemic <a href="#">normally bought about 10%</a> or more new cars per year. With limited inventory of cars to sell, automakers essentially stopped making lower-priced fleet sales, and even rental car companies were forced to turn to the used car market.</p> <p>All that has started to change in recent months. Automakers are reporting more supplies of the chips they need, and are producing and selling more cars, including a return of fleet sales. Overall, sales were up 9% in the fourth quarter compared to a year ago, and nearly 6% higher than in the third quarter, according to Cox Automotive. And with more buyers finding the new cars they want, that means lower demand for used cars.</p> <p>Experts say part of the decline in used car prices is that the price increases were not sustainable and were partly driven by buyers at used car auctions overpaying for the limited supply of used vehicles.</p>



	<p>“There was nowhere for these prices to go but down,” said Markus.</p> <p>There could be more declines in used car prices in the months ahead, as new car inventories continue to build. One thing that could put a floor under the used car prices: late model used cars will likely be in short supply given the reduced new car production over the last three years.</p> <p>“The supply issue is still grim,” said Markus. Because of that, “I don’t think we’re getting down to 2019 levels,” he added.</p> <p>The run-up in used car prices was a major driver in the nation’s overall inflation rate, adding about a full percentage point to the overall increase in consumer prices from April of 2021 through May of 2022. Now it’s a factor helping to bring down the pace of inflation, shaving more than a third of a point off the overall rate in December.</p> <p>This is obviously good news for those wanting or needing to buy a used car, though it can have a negative effect on car buyers by reducing the value of vehicle they hope to trade in. Edmunds shows the average trade-in value in December down nearly \$3,000, or 11%, to \$22,605, from the record high hit in June of 2022.</p> <p>That drop in the value of trade-ins could also be a headwind on car prices by reducing what buyers are able to pay.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/13 Fire summit: increased fire threat to nation</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/u-s-fire-administration-outlines-key-challenges-path-to-solutions-as-nation-faces-increased-fire-threat/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/u-s-fire-administration-outlines-key-challenges-path-to-solutions-as-nation-faces-increased-fire-threat/</a>
GIST	<p>The U.S. Fire Administration released a summary of key problems and recommended solutions from its recent summit that will lay the groundwork for the Fire Service National Strategy and previews a forthcoming Proceedings Report to delve even deeper into solving these critical fire challenges.</p> <p>The <a href="#">executive summary</a> follows the <a href="#">U.S. Fire Administrator’s Summit on Fire Prevention and Control</a> in October, which marked the 75th anniversary of President Truman’s Conference on Fire Prevention and Control in 1947 that launched the “America Burning” report and established the U.S. Fire Administration.</p> <p>Summit discussions focused on preparing for the impacts of climate change on fire departments, investing in a national apprenticeship program to grow the ranks of the fire service, establishing a comprehensive strategy to address cancer in firefighters, providing behavioral health and suicide prevention initiatives for firefighters, enforcing codes and standards to ensure more housing is better protected from fire, and elevating the fire service in developing federal policy to ensure parity with law enforcement.</p> <p>A National Roundtable at the summit allowed fire service leaders to hear from and share thoughts with Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, DHS Deputy Secretary John Tien, Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Criswell, U.S. Fire Administrator Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell, and Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Resilience and Response for the National Security Council (NSC) Caitlin Durkovich.</p> <p>“The summit was only the beginning of a comprehensive and strategic approach to addressing these challenges,” Moore-Merrell wrote in a letter to President Biden at the outset of the executive summary. “Since the summit, the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) and national fire service organizations have been working together to develop comprehensive and actionable solutions.”</p> <p>Six work groups were formed at the summit, and will meet this year in preparation for the 2023 Summit on Fire Prevention and Control.</p>

The first issue is the impact of climate change on the fire service and the need to “prepare all firefighters for the climate-driven increase in wildfires in the wildland urban interface (WUI) by providing them with the proper training and equipment.”

“Advances in command and coordination, especially at large, long-duration wildland and WUI fire events, have improved resource deployment and operations on the ground,” the report notes. “However, these resources often take time to get into place. Therefore, initial response often comes from state and local fire departments, many of which are already dealing with limited and overworked staff.”

Preparing for impacts related to climate change includes ensuring that departments are equipped to handle multiple structures burning simultaneously and confront wildfires as a year-round threat, and making sure that firefighters have proper protective equipment.

“Particularly in the West, water is a limited and often contested resource. Drought conditions elsewhere in the country are causing similar effects to spread eastward,” the report adds. “Scarcity of water has a severe impact on firefighting efforts. Additionally, fire in watershed areas and burn scars following a fire can contaminate water resources as debris and other contaminants affect both availability of potable water and treatment efforts.”

The second area of focus is investing in a national apprenticeship program “to address the shortage of firefighters and to make the fire service more diverse and inclusive.”

“Local communities are facing numerous challenges when it comes to staffing local fire departments,” the report says. “The COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, active shooter, and mass casualty events have all contributed to recruitment and retention challenges for career and volunteer fire departments. In addition, increasing emergency call volumes, greater time demands, time-consuming training requirements, aging communities, and the physical and behavioral risks of the occupation create further challenges to fire departments struggling to maintain sufficient staffing levels.”

Eleven percent of volunteer firefighters and 5 percent of career firefighters are women, according to 2020 data, and 2019 data revealed that the career fire service was 11.6 percent Hispanic or Latino, 8.5 percent African-American, and 1.3 percent Asian or Pacific Islander. The creation of a National Fire Service Apprenticeship would be modeled after the Department of Labor’s Registered Apprenticeship and the Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs.

The third issue is the impact of cancer on firefighters, with the goal to “establish a comprehensive firefighter cancer strategy that invests in research, provides access to cancer screening for firefighters, and reduces and eliminates PFAS exposure.”

Firefighters currently have a 9 percent greater risk of developing cancer and a 14 percent higher risk of dying from cancer than the general population, and can be exposed to contaminants in the course of the job through inhalation, skin absorption, or ingestion after touching contaminated gear and not properly washing hands.

“Greater investment in research will expand our understanding of the mechanisms between occupational exposures and cancer, why firefighters are at heightened risk from some cancers, and to better understand the cancer risks of our under-studied populations, including women and minorities,” the report states. “...Revised screening guidance can help medical professionals and insurance companies understand the need to screen firefighters based on their higher cancer risk,” while “next-generation PPE” can better protect firefighters from PFAS — chemicals that “are found in a firefighter’s blood, their firehouses, some firefighting foams, and perhaps most concerning, bunker gear.”

The fourth area of focus is behavioral health, with the goal to “provide behavioral health resources and suicide prevention initiatives for all firefighters” as at least 100 firefighters per year take their own lives and “approximately 20 percent of firefighters and paramedics meet the criteria for PTSD at some point during their career.”

“Grant programs funding peer-supported behavioral health and wellness programs within fire departments should be established by Congress. Resources should be available to health care providers highlighting best practices for addressing post-traumatic stress among public safety officers. Accurate data on the prevalence and causes of post-traumatic stress and suicide with the fire service must be collected,” the report continues. “According to evidence-based research, behavioral health awareness campaigns provide effective intervention methods. It is our collective responsibility to provide those who serve with the tools they need to help themselves and each other.”

The fifth issue is implementing and enforcing codes and standards, “especially in the wildland urban interface (WUI) and under-served and vulnerable populations providing affordable and fire-safe housing,” to create safer communities. Housing and Urban Development, for example, “estimates that approximately 570,000 multi-family public housing units are in their inventory that were constructed before the sprinkler requirement.”

“In buildings with automatic fire sprinkler systems, the civilian fire death rate is 89 percent lower than non-sprinklered buildings and the injury rate is 27 percent lower. Furthermore, property damage decreases significantly in buildings protected by fire sprinklers,” the report says. “Investments must be made in retrofitting public housing with fire sprinkler systems. Nearly three out of five home fire deaths are caused by fires in properties without smoke alarms or smoke alarms that failed to operate. HUD must provide resources to public housing authorities to either retrofit housing units with hardwired smoke alarms or require the installation of tamper-resistant long-life battery-powered smoke alarms.”

The sixth goal is to “elevate the fire service in federal policy development to an equal basis with law enforcement.”

“Innovative thinking, the willingness to use all available tools, and, perhaps most importantly, the collaboration of all parties is necessary to meet these challenges,” Moore-Merrell wrote.

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HEADLINE	01/16 NYC mayor: no more room for migrants
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/16/eric-adams-new-york-city-migrants">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/16/eric-adams-new-york-city-migrants</a>
GIST	<p>In an unprecedented visit by a New York City mayor to the Mexico border, <a href="#">Eric Adams</a> said his city doesn’t have enough “room” to host more migrants in its strained care system.</p> <p>He made his remarks on Sunday at a news conference during his trip to El Paso, Texas, the <a href="#">first visit of its kind</a> by a New York mayor, after an ongoing crisis sparked by the controversial decision of some Republican governors in the south to send migrants to mostly Democratic-administered municipalities around the US.</p> <p>“No city deserves what is happening. This is a beautiful city,” he said of El Paso, “and what happened over the last few months undermines this city”.</p> <p>He echoed the same thoughts for Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston and Washington.</p> <p>“We don’t deserve this, migrants don’t deserve this, and the people who live in this city don’t deserve this,” he added.</p> <p>Since September, thousands of migrants – about 3,100 according to Adams’s estimate – have been bused to New York City from Texas by the Republican governor, Greg Abbott, without New York’s agreement. Many of the migrants have been sent involuntarily and <a href="#">often with no direction</a> on where to go after arriving.</p> <p>The city has housed them in homeless shelters, which were already overcrowded, not to mention often avoided by homeless people themselves due to the shelter system’s <a href="#">record of abuse</a> and violence.</p>

He said more than 800 migrants came in a single day. “That is a record in our city,” he said.

Adams blamed a lack of coordination from the federal government and said he will be raising the issue in the United States Conference of Mayors, which starts on Tuesday.

“This crisis has mayors pitted against each other. And that can’t happen,” he said.

He also suggested that the image of [New York](#) being a welcoming city for migrants is misleadingly glamorized.

“We have to give people accurate information,” he said, adding that those with sponsors and family members are welcome.

“We welcome those the city doesn’t have to have in their care system,” he added. “But that should not come at the price tag of those New Yorkers.”

A video shared by Adams’s press secretary, Fabien Levy, shows the mayor speaking with a man in a border patrol uniform who is seen trying to explain to him how some people use ladders to cross the border wall.

In another video, Adams tells a group of asylum seekers that he will “fight” for them to work so that they can “experience the American dream”. His message, once translated, sparked cheers and applause from the group of asylum seekers.

It is unclear where he believes asylum seekers should be placed after arriving in the US. As of publication time the mayor’s office had not yet responded to a request for clarification.

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HEADLINE	01/16 Calif. grapples w/extreme weather havoc
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/16/california-weather-rainstorms-deadly-atmospheric-river">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/16/california-weather-rainstorms-deadly-atmospheric-river</a>
GIST	<p>As more dangerous storms bear down on <a href="#">California</a>, the state is only just beginning to grapple with the destruction and death left by weeks of extreme weather that wreaked havoc in nearly every region from the northern coast to Los Angeles.</p> <p>The series of storms that have pummeled California since late December have <a href="#">killed at least 19 people</a>, brought hurricane force winds that toppled trees and power lines, cutting energy to thousands, and flooded roads and rivers, covering swaths of land in dense mud and debris that stretches for miles. Entire communities have been forced to evacuate while road closures and power disruptions left some rural regions isolated and almost cut off from the outside world.</p> <p>Authorities are still documenting the toll of the disaster, an effort that’s been hampered by a fresh onslaught of more storms. Joe Biden has approved emergency declarations from 41 of California’s 58 counties.</p> <p>“These storms are among the most deadly natural disasters in the modern history of our state,” Nancy Ward, the director of the governor’s office of emergency services said at a briefing on Friday.</p> <p>After a grueling drought and California’s driest years on record, the latest turn of extreme weather, which some experts have called hydrological “whiplash”, has highlighted the challenges that come with such a rapid deluge, particularly in a state more accustomed in recent years to disasters related to heat and wildfire.</p>

California has received an average of more than 9in of rainfall since late December and some areas have already seen the amount of rain they typically get in the entire year, according to the National Weather Service.

But one of the greatest impacts from the recent weather is also the intense and widespread wind damage that far exceeds that seen during typical wind events, climate scientist Daniel Swain said in a video update on Friday. In central California's Calaveras county, a tornado with 90mph winds uprooted a barn.

"This has been a deadly storm sequence. The damage will probably be at least in the hundreds of millions if not higher before all is said and done," Swain said. "And the disruption to people, even people who have stayed relatively safe – there are a lot of folks who have been without power and without road access to where they live for a long time."

#### **'Catastrophic impacts'**

The damage wrought by the storms could be seen in central California's San Luis Obispo county where search and rescue teams have spent days trying to find a missing five-year-old boy who [disappeared in floodwaters](#). In photos posted online, the sheriff's office showed the thick mud, brush piles and debris teams have trudged through while searching for Kyle Doan.

Doan was swept away after floodwaters overtook the car he was traveling in with his mother. There were no signs on the road warning of closures, his father told the Guardian, and water rapidly overtook the vehicle, pulling it toward a nearby creek. As the pair evacuated the vehicle, the currents pulled the kindergartner from his mother's arms and forced her underwater. Residents were able to rescue Lindsay Doan with a rope, but the water quickly carried Kyle away before rescuers could get to him.

"Days have now gone by, we still haven't found him yet," Brian Doan said on Thursday. "We went over there today about a mile downstream from where my wife was picked up and you can just see the aftermath the water receded there's just so much debris that was wrapped around trees."

The storms also highlighted the grave risks extreme weather poses to more than 116,000 people living outdoors in the state. Two unhoused people in Sacramento [died earlier this month](#) when trees fell on to their tents.

"It's horrifying. You've got 7,000 people or more trying to survive the rain and high winds. The little survival gear they have – it gets blown away pretty easily," Bob Erlenbusch, the executive director of the Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness, told the Guardian. "People get wet, their belongings get wet. These are really difficult conditions."

The impacts of the storms have been far-reaching. More than 96,000 people were placed under evacuation orders or warnings as the National Weather Service issued flood watches for roughly 90% of the state's sprawling population. Hundreds of harrowing water rescues had to be performed by emergency workers as submerged streets shuttered highways and other transportation corridors.

On the central coast, more than 10,000 people were ordered to evacuate seaside towns last week, including all of Montecito – the wealthy community that is home to Prince Harry, Oprah Winfrey and other celebrities. Officials in Santa Barbara shut down schools and public transit systems due to the extreme weather. Further south in Los Angeles, a sinkhole swallowed two cars and flooded a downtown transit hub.

The storm also caused a sewage spill of more than 14m gallons into the Ventura River, prompting authorities to post warning signs along the river and beaches.

Workers with Cal Trans have spent recent weeks clearing trees, rocks and mud from state highways after the storms closed as many as 60 roads. "We're doing everything we can to keep the highways open," the department's deputy director Michael Keever said Friday.

	<p>With rain expected through the week, authorities are warning Californians to listen to local officials, stay aware of their surroundings and not attempt to drive or walk in water – just 6in of fast-moving water can knock over and carry an adult while just a foot of water can carry away a small car.</p> <p>“We’re not out of the woods – we expect these storms to continue at least through the middle of next week with a minimum of three more atmospheric rivers hitting our state,” Governor Gavin Newsom said as he toured the damage in Santa Cruz, just south of the Bay Area. “California is soaked and even an inch more of rain can bring catastrophic impacts like flooding and mudslides.”</p> <p>The rains did do some good, offering a reprieve from the state’s devastating drought conditions. Reservoir levels rose significantly this week and the snowpack swelled significantly, which will secure the state’s water resources through the spring and summer. But new dangers lurk in the seasons ahead. Vegetation seeded during these winter storms can quickly turn to wildfire fuel when the weather warms and dries.</p> <p>For now, the sodden state waits in anticipation for drier days, when the immense cleanup process can commence.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/17 Day 328 of the Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/17/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-328-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/17/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-328-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>More than 7,000 civilians have been killed in Ukraine since Russia invaded its neighbour last February</b>, the Office of the UN high commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said on Monday. The UN rights office said it had confirmed 7,031 civilian deaths but believes actual casualty tolls are “considerably higher” given the pending corroboration of many reports and the inaccessibility of areas where intense fighting is taking place.</li> <li>• <b>Russia and Ukraine have been working on a large prisoner exchange deal which will include 1,000 people in total</b>, Turkish ombudsman Seref Malkoc said on Monday. Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova and her Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Lubinets met last week on the sidelines of an international ombudsman conference in Ankara.</li> <li>• <b>Britain will send a squadron of Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine to help push back Russia’s invasion, the defence secretary, Ben Wallace, has confirmed.</b> <a href="#">Outlining details</a> to the UK’s parliament, Wallace described the military support as “the most significant package of combat power to date to accelerate Ukrainian success”.</li> <li>• <b>The announcement makes the UK the first western power to supply the Ukrainians with main battle tanks</b>, which would be used to help train Ukrainian troops, and will heap further pressure on Germany to approve a wider delivery of the vehicles this week. Britain’s defence secretary, Ben Wallace, <a href="#">urged Germany</a> to permit the supply of Leopard tanks to Ukraine, adding that the move could unlock support from other nations.</li> <li>• <b>Germany should take “decisive actions” and send “all sorts of weapons” to Ukraine to help its troops defend themselves against Russia’s invasion</b>, Poland’s prime minister, <b>Mateusz Morawiecki</b>, has said. Morawiecki, speaking in parliament, <a href="#">implicitly criticised</a> the German chancellor, <b>Olaf Scholz</b>, for his reluctance to supply Kyiv with heavier weaponry.</li> <li>• <b>Germany’s foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, and her Dutch counterpart, Wopke Hoekstra, condemned the deportation by Russians of thousands of Ukrainian children.</b> Russia “must account for the whereabouts of these children”, Baerbock said <a href="#">at a joint news conference with Hoekstra</a>, who said this “deliberate Russian policy” is “tearing families apart and traumatising children”.</li> <li>• <b>Russia carried out two mass rocket strikes on Ukraine on Saturday, devastating an apartment block in the south-central city of Dnipro</b>, where at least 40 people have died and scores were injured. Dozens are still missing, <a href="#">city official Gennadiy Korban wrote on Telegram</a> on Monday. 75 people were wounded in the strike, including 14 children, he said. The victims from the attack included a 15-year-old girl, President <b>Volodymyr Zelenskiy</b> said in his latest nightly address.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Russia and Belarus <a href="#">began joint air force drills</a> this morning, triggering fears in Kyiv and the west that Moscow could use its ally to launch a new ground offensive in Ukraine.</b> According to <a href="#">a statement</a> published to the Telegram account of the Belarus ministry of defence, units from Russia's aerospace forces arrived at the airfields of Belarus late on Sunday night. Shortly after 8am local time the ministry said the planned combat training tasks had begun.</li> <li>• <b>Russia launched an attack on Ukraine's south-eastern city of Zaporizhzhia overnight, wounding civilians and destroying residential infrastructure,</b> according to regional officials. Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the office of the president of Ukraine, said "The occupiers launched a rocket attack on the regional centre. The rocket hit next to a five-story building. Five people, <a href="#">including two children aged nine and 15</a>, were injured by glass fragments. The children were hospitalised."</li> <li>• <b>President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke by phone on Monday where they discussed the conflict in Ukraine,</b> according to <a href="#">readouts of the call from both sides</a>. The pair discussed the question of a prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine, the Kremlin said, as well as the export of Ukrainian grain from Black Sea ports and ways to unblock fertiliser and food exports from Russia.</li> <li>• <b>Nato's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, <a href="#">said</a> Ukraine could expect more deliveries of heavy weapons from western countries soon.</b> Western allies will consider sending battle tanks to Kyiv ahead of a meeting in Ramstein in Germany on Friday, where governments are expected to announce their latest pledges of military support.</li> <li>• <b>A Russian man who reportedly fought for the private mercenary Wagner group has crossed into Norway and requested political asylum,</b> according to Norwegian authorities. <b>Andrey Medvedev</b>, who reportedly served as a high-ranking Wagner group member, has sought shelter in Norway, <a href="#">authorities confirmed</a> to the Associated Press.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Climate activists vow to take to the streets</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/16/climate-activists-vow-to-take-to-the-streets-to-stop-fossil-fuel-extraction">https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/16/climate-activists-vow-to-take-to-the-streets-to-stop-fossil-fuel-extraction</a>
GIST	<p>Hundreds of thousands of young climate activists have said they will continue "protesting in the streets in huge numbers" against fossil fuels, a day after Greta Thunberg was removed by German police from a condemned village atop a massive coal deposit.</p> <p>In a <a href="#">cease-and-desist letter</a> to the CEOs of fossil fuel companies, youth campaigners accuse them of a "direct violation of our human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, your duties of care, as well as the rights of Indigenous people".</p> <p>"This cease-and-desist notice is to demand that you immediately stop opening any new oil, gas or coal extraction sites, and stop blocking the clean energy transition we all so urgently need," the letter says.</p> <p>Already signed by more than 650,000 people, the letter goes on: "Big Oil knew for decades that fossil fuels cause catastrophic climate change, misled the public about climate science and risks, [and] deceived politicians with disinformation sowing doubt and causing delay."</p> <p>The letter warns that failure to act would mean citizens around the world would consider taking "any and all legal action" to hold the companies accountable. "And we will keep protesting in the streets in huge numbers," it says.</p> <p>Signatories included Vanessa Nakate from Uganda, Greta Thunberg from Sweden, Helena Gualinga from Ecuador and Luisa Neubauer from <a href="#">Germany</a>. They say: "It feels extremely difficult to keep hope alive in the face of climate devastation around the world. But our hope lies in people – in the millions of us who are determined to come together and demand action. It's time to put these CEOs on notice – showing them that 2023 will be a watershed moment for accountability."</p>

On Sunday, Thunberg was “grabbed and carried away” by two police officers in riot gear evicting climate activists in Lützerath, Germany, [Bild reported](#). She was among thousands protesting in and blockading the village, which has been earmarked for demolition to make way for an opencast coal mine. “We need to keep the carbon in the ground and Germany is really embarrassing itself now,” [she said](#).

The call comes as the [UK seeks new powers to stop radical climate activists](#) who have shut down roads, bridges and oil terminals and targeted art galleries and sporting events in a months-long campaign of civil disobedience. Politicians were infuriated last month when the group switched tactics and police were forced to facilitate their slow marches disrupting motor traffic in central London.

A new amendment to a public order bill would empower police to stop such protests by broadening the threshold for “serious disruption” to include “long-running campaigns”. In such cases, police “will not need to wait for disruption to take place” before shutting down protests. No 10 said the new powers would “give police officers absolute clarity over when they should step in”.

Lawyers warned of considerable ambiguity around the definition of “serious disruption”, introduced in last year’s Policing Act, and said the new powers could amount to de facto bans on certain groups. Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil are named in government briefings for the new bill.

Tom Wainwright of Garden Court chambers, who specialises in protest cases, said: “The government make it quite clear who they are targeting, and if the police are allowed to lump together disparate protests which operate under the same or a similar banner, then they are very likely to effectively close down particular groups.

“You could end up with almost a de facto blacklist, and treating protest groups like proscribed organisations, like terrorist organisations.”

Kirsty Brimelow, a barrister with Doughty Street chambers, who is chair of the Criminal Bar Association, said the amendment failed to provide police with the clarity they had asked for. “Many respected charities head long-running campaigns which ultimately are in the public interest,” she said. “This proposed restriction therefore appears overly broad and in itself unclear.

“There already is civil law in the form of injunctions available for pre-emptive action. Of course, a balance must be struck [between the right to protest and] the rights of others, but those decisions are decided by magistrates and courts every day.”

A study published last week found that scientists at oil giant [Exxon privately made “breathtakingly” accurate climate predictions](#) in the 1970s and 1980s, only for the company to go on to publicly dismiss global heating. The International Energy Agency concluded in 2021 that there could be [no new oil- or gasfields or coalmines if the world was to reach net zero by 2050](#). A Guardian investigation in May showed how the world’s [biggest fossil fuel firms were quietly planning scores of “carbon bomb” oil and gas projects](#) that would drive the climate past internationally agreed temperature limits.

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HEADLINE	01/16 Driving in WA among worst in nation
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3781702/driving-washington-among-worst-nation-traffic/">https://mynorthwest.com/3781702/driving-washington-among-worst-nation-traffic/</a>
GIST	<p>Driving in Washington is challenging. In fact, we are 49 out of 50 states as the worst state to drive in.</p> <p>Only Hawaii is lower than us, and at least there, you’re dealing with sunshine.</p> <p>This comes from a new WalletHub study examining 31 key indicators of a positive commute.</p> <p>The study surveyed these four key dimensions: Cost of ownership and maintenance; traffic and infrastructure; safety and access to vehicles and maintenance.</p>

Washington didn't fare well. The overall conclusion is that Iowa ranks best and Washington is second-worst.

Washington was next to last when all of the critical dimensions were combined, with a score of 47.48. The state scored a 39 when it came to traffic and infrastructure.

Coming in dead last was Hawaii with an overall score of 40.28, including a 43 on traffic and infrastructure.

Just ahead of Washington was Delaware with a 47.50. Traffic and infrastructure was a 36.

Traffic & Infrastructure included:

- Share of rush hour traffic congestion
- Increase in vehicle travel on highways (2022 vs. 2000)
- Number of days with precipitation
- Number of icy days
- Number of strong winds & hail storms
- Average commute time by car
- Road Quality
- Bridge Quality
- Roadway miles per 1000 persons

Another important aspect of driving the survey looked at the cost of ownership and maintenance:

- Average gas prices
- Average annual car insurance premium
- Auto-maintenance costs
- total extra vehicle operating costs per driver

After viewing the data, you can see that Washington ranked 4th-worst in the nation for gas prices, with Hawaii coming in last.

Iowa ranks as the best state, overall, for drivers.

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See the complete [here](#).

HEADLINE	<b>01/17 Incessant rain, floods devastate Philippines</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/17/philippines-flood-climate-rain-weather-typhoon/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/17/philippines-flood-climate-rain-weather-typhoon/</a>
GIST	<p>MANILA — The Philippines has been welcomed into the new year by incessant rain, fatal flooding and landslides in many provinces.</p> <p><a href="#">Nearly every day so far in January</a>, heavy rains have caused a town or city to issue emergency warnings, order evacuations or respond with relief efforts. At least 28 people have died this month, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said Monday. More than 211,000 people have been displaced among 1.3 million affected as the rains have destroyed homes, infrastructure, crops and fishing boats.</p> <p>That follows the <a href="#">50 killed</a> and more than 50,000 displaced during the holiday season by torrential rains that began Dec. 25 and continued through New Year's Day.</p> <p>The Philippines, an archipelago nation of more than 7,000 islands, has two seasons: the dry season, from December to May, and the rainy season, from June to November. Typhoons strike frequently. The floods this month have heightened concerns that climate change is fueling extreme weather that will make such events more common.</p>

Although January ordinarily sees less rainfall, heavy downpours this month have hit the country hard, particularly southern provinces. The mayor of Tacloban City, in the Eastern Visayas region, told constituents last week to [prepare emergency kits, store food and “most of all, don’t forget to pray to the one above.”](#) Authorities in Zamboanga City in the south are balancing [evacuations](#) from flooded homes, [housing](#) displaced families, and distributing [relief](#) and medical aid as the forecast for the next week shows little indication that the rains will relent.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., overseeing aid distribution last week in Misamis Occidental, a southern province put under an official “state of calamity,” said the Philippines needs a long-term solution to perennial floods. Inclement weather prevented him from landing in some cities on his itinerary.

“We are looking at everything to find a solution,” he said. “We will continue to dredge rivers ... and we will continue to improve flood controls.”

“But in the long term,” he continued, “we need to think about how we can do it so that this never happens again. We don’t have this kind of risk anymore.”

The dead have included children. Jaymar Sahim, a [13-year-old](#) eighth-grade student, fell into a flooded ditch in Zamboanga City last week and was swept away by a strong current. Earlier in January, a [5-year-old boy](#) drowned in flooded Davao del Norte, and an 8-year-old girl was swept away by strong waters in [Lanao del Norte](#).

Nonstop rains in [Mati City](#) before New Year’s Day loosened a landslide that killed two cousins, ages 15 and 14, and two others.

Climate change is expected to exacerbate the problem. [Warming makes the world wetter](#) by increasing humidity and heat indexes and making precipitation extremes more frequent. Human-caused climate change made last year’s devastating flooding in West Africa [80 times more probable](#), researchers with World Weather Attribution reported in November.

Still, the Philippines has significantly improved its resiliency, especially since Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, one of the strongest tropical cyclones ever recorded, which killed [more than 6,000 people](#), according to national disaster officials.

Obstacles remain. Joshua Agar, an assistant professor at the University of the Philippines’ Institute of Civil Engineering, said political will and attention in the Philippines are often misplaced.

“Due to our political culture, much focus was put on disaster relief (where personalities seize opportunities to put themselves in a good light through philanthropy) rather than on disaster prevention (where comprehensive disaster risk management is needed, with science steering the policies),” he wrote in an email.

The term “natural disaster” can be misleading, he said, because deaths during naturally occurring hazards can be reduced with proper response and prevention.

To be more resilient, said Kristoffer Berse, director for research and creative work at the University of the Philippines’ Resilience Institute, cities should improve drainage systems, build infrastructure such as levees to protect coastal areas, and improve risk assessment and early-warning systems.

“What we need to prepare for is the increasing complexity of cascading disasters — events that happen successively, if not as a result of or aggravated by a prior disaster,” Berse said.

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HEADLINE	01/16 Covid, RSV, flu: case of viral interference?
SOURCE	<a href="https://arstechnica.com/science/2023/01/covid-rsv-and-the-flu-a-case-of-viral-interference/">https://arstechnica.com/science/2023/01/covid-rsv-and-the-flu-a-case-of-viral-interference/</a>

Three years into the pandemic, COVID-19 is still going strong, causing wave after wave as case numbers soar, subside, then ascend again. But this past autumn saw something new—or rather, something old: the return of the flu. Plus, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)—a virus that makes few headlines in normal years—ignited in its own surge, creating a “triple-demic.”

The surges in these old foes were particularly striking because flu and RSV all but disappeared during the first two winters of the [pandemic](#). Even more surprising, one particular version of the flu may [have gone extinct](#) during the early COVID pandemic. The World Health Organization’s [surveillance program](#) has not definitively detected the B/Yamagata flu strain since March 2020. “I don’t think anyone is going to stick their neck out and say it’s gone just yet,” says Richard Webby, a virologist at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis. But, he adds, “we hope it got squeezed out.” Such an extinction would be a super rare event, Webby says.

But then, the past few years have been highly unusual times for human-virus relations, and lockdowns and masks went a long way toward preventing flu and RSV from infiltrating human nostrils. Still, Webby thinks another factor may have kept them at bay while COVID raged. It’s called viral interference, and it simply means that the presence of one virus can block another.

Viral interference can happen in individual cells in the lab, and in individual animals and people that are exposed to multiple viruses—but it can also play out across entire populations, if enough people get one virus for it to hinder the flourishing of others at scale. This results in waves of infections by individual viruses that take turns to dominate. “Looking back over the past couple of years, I’m pretty confident in saying that COVID can certainly block flu and RSV,” Webby says.

It wouldn’t be the first time that scientists have observed such patterns. Back in 2009, for example, the virus to fear was swine flu, which had jumped from pigs to people in spring of that year. It looked poised to ramp up as autumn arrived—but suddenly, in some parts of Europe, it stagnated. The rhinovirus, responsible for the common cold and likely spread by children returning to school, took center stage for a series of weeks before swine flu recaptured dominance. That flu strain then [delayed the typical autumn rise of RSV](#) by as much as two and a half months.

### Running interference

There are a number of ways that interference can happen in the body. One occurs when two viruses use the same molecule to gain entry into host cells. If virus A gets there first, and grabs on to all those molecular doorknobs, then virus B will be out of luck.

Another kind of interference might happen if two viruses compete for the same resources inside the cell, such as the machinery to make new viral proteins or the means to escape that cell to infect others. “Think of it as a race between two viruses,” Webby says.

But the best-understood method of interference concerns a defensive molecule called interferon that’s [made by cells of all animals with backbones](#) (and possibly some invertebrates too). Indeed, viral interference is the [reason interferon got its name](#) to begin with. When a cell senses a virus, any virus, it starts making interferon. And that, in turn, activates a [slew of defensive genes](#). Some of the products of those genes work inside the cell or at its boundaries, where they prevent additional viruses from entering and block viruses already present from replicating or exiting the cell.

Cells secrete interferon into their surroundings, warning other cells to put up their guard. The result of all this: If a second virus then comes along, cells have their defenses already activated, and they may be able to shut it out.

This “beware” message can spread throughout the body. So, in theory, getting a respiratory virus such as the rhinovirus could activate defenses in, say, the gut, protecting the same person from an entirely different virus, such as [norovirus](#). But the situation will vary depending on the viruses involved, the amount of interferon produced, and other factors. “Most of the viruses themselves have ways to neutralize the



interferon system,” says Ganes Sen, a virologist at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio, who wrote about the interactions between [interferon and viruses](#) for the Annual Review of Virology in 2015. “It’s a tug of war.”

Scientists study that back-and-forth in animals and other systems in the lab. For example, Ellen Foxman, an immunologist at Yale School of Medicine, investigates viral interactions in lab-grown tissues made from real human airway cells. In one experiment, she studied swine flu and a typical representative of the rhinovirus family. When the researchers infected the human tissue first with the rhinovirus, and then with swine flu, interferon [prevented the flu from getting a foothold](#). In similar studies, she found that rhinovirus infection also [interfered with subsequent SARS-CoV-2](#) infection.

It’s iffy to extrapolate from tissues in the lab to people or populations, but Foxman thinks the studies reflect biological truth. “It’s probable that if you get a rhinovirus infection, that’s going to make you relatively resistant to another virus for some period of time,” she says. Foxman speculates that the protective effect probably lasts days or weeks.

But don’t go counting on a cold granting you temporary immunity from other viruses. Interference isn’t guaranteed: It’s certainly possible to catch more than one virus at the same time. And interferon isn’t always beneficial, either; sometimes, it can make people more susceptible to infection, not less. A well-known example is that the flu makes people more susceptible to a secondary bacterial infection.

In the ongoing pandemic, it’s still hard to say how much of a role, if any, interference played in shutting down RSV and flu in populations around the globe. During the first COVID wave in 2020, Foxman thinks that not enough people had COVID for it to be interfering with other viruses on a grand scale. (RSV [underwent an unusual summer peak](#) in 2021 as people eased up on masking and other precautions.)

But by the second COVID winter, in 2021-22, Webby thinks he sees population-level evidence for interference. Influenza was starting to pick up in the fall, he says, but then the omicron variant of COVID burst onto the scene. Flu rates fell—even though people were back at work and school and traveling for the holidays. The coronavirus had a big advantage that season, he says, because many people still lacked immunity to it. It doesn’t mean COVID will always edge out influenza in the future.

In the third COVID winter now underway in the Northern Hemisphere, conditions are different yet again. Many people now have immunity to COVID, from a recent bout or from vaccination, but fewer have experienced RSV or flu in recent memory. That set the scene for flu and RSV to stage a massive dual comeback, hitting early and hard.

Any potential interference during the 2022-23 tripledemic winter will become more obvious once epidemiologists can look back on the season and see if each virus took its turn. Already, there are indicators that the [fall surges of RSV](#) and [flu might have peaked](#), while COVID is [on the upswing](#) after the winter holidays. But there are still several cold months to come, providing ample opportunity for any of the trio to rise again.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Record Seattle fentanyl homeless deaths</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Fentanyl-fuels-record-homeless-deaths-in-Seattle-17721076.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Fentanyl-fuels-record-homeless-deaths-in-Seattle-17721076.php</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — A record 310 homeless people died in the Seattle area last year, highlighting the region's struggle to house the thousands of people living on its streets.</p> <p>The 310 deaths in King County surpassed the previous record of 195 homeless deaths set in 2018, the Seattle Times reported, and marked a 65% jump over 2021.</p> <p>“That’s just appalling,” the paper quoted Chloe Gale, policy and strategy vice president for REACH, the largest homelessness outreach provider in Seattle, as saying.</p>



Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said it underscore his administration’s urgent need to get more people indoors.

Fentanyl-related overdoses accounted for more than half of the deaths. Many people had a combination of fentanyl and other drugs such as meth or cocaine in their system, the paper reported, citing records from the King County Medical Examiner’s Office.

Eighteen homeless people died by homicide, a number that more than doubled from 2021.

Thirty-five people died from natural causes at a much younger age than is typical. The average age of death for homeless people was 48, the medical examiner found.

Ten people died from hypothermia or exposure, and seven died from suicide.

The county has directed its public health, human services and homelessness agencies to survey homeless providers to find out what is needed to help curb fatal overdoses. The county is also increasing funding for harm-reduction efforts.

Last year, Public Health – Seattle & King County distributed more than 10,000 kits of naloxone, a medication that can reverse opioid overdoses, and about 100,000 fentanyl test strips. The agency is leading public awareness campaigns about the synthetic opioid and helping people find treatment.

Fentanyl has been driving overdose fatalities in the county more broadly, regardless of people's housing status. As of November, it was involved in 70% of all confirmed overdose deaths in the county in 2022, according to a recent report by Public Health – Seattle & King County.

Brad Finegood, who leads the agency's opioid and overdose response, said researchers keep watching the monthly overdose numbers, hoping to see rates flatten out.

“Maybe we’re plateauing at a really bad rate and maybe it’s going to get worse,” Finegood said. “I don’t know when it’s going to stop.”

The point-in-time count conducted in the county last year found that 13,368 people were living outside.

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HEADLINE	01/16 Record homeless deaths King Co. 2022
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/more-homeless-people-died-in-king-county-in-2022-than-ever-recorded-before/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/more-homeless-people-died-in-king-county-in-2022-than-ever-recorded-before/</a>
GIST	<p>The 911 caller thought Trenton Harris had overdosed.</p> <p>Slumped over a wooden Seattle park bench, his head down and arms limp — the call came in during the afternoon, 2:45 p.m., Seattle police reported, but his body had been there all day.</p> <p>His mom, Jennifer Dobbins, said that she would have been prepared for a call like that. He had struggled with substance use disorder for years and was living outside at the time. But that wasn’t the call she received.</p> <p>Harris, 30, was fatally shot four times in July 2022. His death was ruled a homicide by the King County Medical Examiner’s Office.</p> <p>He was one of 18 homeless people who died by homicide in King County last year, a number that more than doubled from 2021. The jump is made more alarming because violence usually makes up a small portion of the ways homeless people die.</p>

But 2022 was exceptionally brutal for people living outside. A record-setting 310 people died while homeless in Seattle and across King County, a 65% jump over 2021 and an increase of over 100 people from the previous record set in 2018 (195 deaths), according to medical examiner records.

“That’s just appalling,” said Chloe Gale, policy and strategy vice president for REACH, the largest homelessness outreach provider in Seattle.

The county’s homeless death toll is an undercount because it relies on the Medical Examiner’s Office, which only investigates people who died of sudden, unexpected or unnatural causes. Most people’s cause of death is determined by a physician rather than a medical examiner.

Still, 2022 marked the sharpest increase in homeless deaths the county has ever reported, following years of counts that broke or approached records, only to be broken again.

In 2021, 188 homeless people died. And December 2020 set a recent record for the most people dying without housing in a single month, at 29, a number that seems small compared with 2022’s monthly counts.

King County officials said it has recently directed Public Health – Seattle & King County to work with the county’s Department of Community and Human Services and the King County Regional Homeless Authority to survey homeless service providers to learn more about what’s working to mitigate the risk of fatal overdoses among their clients and to find out what more is needed. The county is also increasing funding to support harm-reduction work.

Beyond that, however, Seattle and homelessness officials said they don’t have any specific plans to try to curb this trend. They instead pointed to existing law enforcement, public health harm reduction strategies, and shelter and housing efforts already planned.

Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said these numbers underscore his administration’s urgency to get more people indoors, working in collaboration with the King County Regional Homelessness Authority.

Anne Martens, spokesperson for the authority, said these deaths were “preventable” and that it’s “a result of deep holes in our social safety net and an ongoing national opioid epidemic,” and pointed to Public Health for solutions.

Public Health in 2022 distributed more than 10,000 naloxone kits — the drug reverses fentanyl overdoses — and about 100,000 fentanyl test strips. The agency is leading public awareness campaigns about the synthetic opioid, as well as helping people find treatment.

But no agency said it was focused specifically on the uptick in fatal violence.

The Seattle Police Department noted that homicides rose across all populations, with 56 criminal homicide investigations reported in 2022. Homeless people make up more than 32% of those.

Agency officials declined to say what could be causing this increase or whether combating the rise in violent deaths for homeless people requires different strategies than for housed people.

Some homelessness outreach workers said that as the pandemic made informal work, like odd jobs, harder to get, [more people have been forced to participate in illicit economies of need](#), such as selling drugs to maintain their habit.

And often, these industries are regulated by force.

Dobbins, who lives in Bonney Lake, doesn’t know who or what led to her son’s killing six months ago, and Seattle police have not publicly released any information.

Dobbins said she found out three days after her son was found dead in Kobe Terrace park in the Chinatown International District. He didn't have an ID on him, so they had to identify him using his fingerprints, she said.

After Harris became homeless and couldn't keep hold of a cellphone, Dobbins would show up in Seattle on the same day every month to meet him. She would take him out for pizza. Bring him fresh socks and a Mountain Dew. No matter what kind of shape he was in, she would give him a hug and a kiss.

Harris entered treatment several times for opioids, but it never stuck.

"I was worried all the time," Dobbins said.

Before she left for home, Dobbins would take a selfie with her oldest child. She has loads of them on her phone. He was using fentanyl at the time of his death and living outside, and she wanted to have recent photos in case he ever came up missing.

Fentanyl-related fatal overdose deaths made up more than half of all reported deaths of homeless people in 2022. The Medical Examiner's Office found many people had a combination of fentanyl and other drugs, such as meth or cocaine, in their system.

The synthetic opioid — which is easy to produce and currently cheap to buy — is driving a national epidemic that crosses social and economic borders.

As of November, fentanyl was involved in 70% of all confirmed overdose deaths, regardless of housing status, last year in King County, compared with less than 10% before 2018, according to a recent report by Public Health – Seattle & King County.

Brad Finegood, who leads the opioid and overdose response for Public Health, said researchers keep watching the monthly overdose numbers, hoping to see rates plateau.

"Maybe we're plateauing at a really bad rate and maybe it's going to get worse," Finegood said. "I don't know when it's going to stop."

On the longest night of the year, during one of Seattle's coldest weeks, Dobbins joined more than 50 people gathered outside Seattle City Hall to remember every person who died while homeless in 2022. Joined by four other family members that evening, she stood on Seattle City Hall's steps, holding a white poster board with her son's name written in black.

At the time, the Solstice Vigil's organizers, WHEEL and Women in Black, handed out pamphlets with 269 names. It should be 270, organizers said, because they had just learned a man died, blocks from where they stood the night before.

"The long emergency of homelessness keeps getting worse, not better, while politicians posture and governments plan a new initiative and housing comes with agonizing slowness," Michael Ramos, executive director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, said at the event.

Many people died from common symptoms of homelessness — compounding health effects that come from living without stable housing or regular medical care.

Ten people died from hypothermia or environmental exposure, according to the medical examiner. Seven died from suicide. And many more died from natural causes, at a much younger age than is typical.

The average age of death for people presumed homeless in King County last year was 48, according to the medical examiner's report.

	<p>While drug use always ranks high as a driver of deaths for people who are homeless, these other factors cause the majority of deaths in average years.</p> <p>Paige Killinger, who oversees homeless outreach in Sodo for REACH, said that for many of her clients, getting into housing is a matter of life and death.</p> <p>Killinger said her team worked with a client this fall to find housing using an Emergency Housing Voucher, which the federal government created as part of the American Rescue Plan Act to get more people into permanent housing.</p> <p>The client was one day from moving into her new space, Killinger said, when she died from overdose.</p> <p>She kept telling caseworkers that if she stayed on the streets, she'd die, Killinger said.</p> <p>"And she did," she said.</p> <p>It's exhausting, Killinger said, for people working in homeless services — which have seen significant labor shortages during the pandemic — to be so close to so much preventable death and despair.</p> <p>"It's hard to keep people in this work when it's constant death," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Seattle MLK Day march draws over 2,000</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattles-mlk-march-includes-calls-for-racial-equity-and-social-reform/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattles-mlk-march-includes-calls-for-racial-equity-and-social-reform/</a>
GIST	<p>Keep moving forward.</p> <p>That was the theme Monday as thousands gathered at Garfield High School before marching through the Central District to commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. Day — 40 years after the federal holiday was signed into law and 55 years after the civil rights leader was assassinated.</p> <p>Throughout the crowd, hundreds held signs and wore buttons emblazoned with those three words: "Keep moving forward."</p> <p>Calls for fairness in housing and employment, an end to mass incarceration and — above all — an end to racial discrimination propelled the day's speeches and one-on-one conversations.</p> <p>By late Monday morning, a thick crowd had gathered outside Garfield while, inside the packed high school gymnasium, nearly 2,000 people listened to speakers, including members of the Black Prisoners' Caucus — a support organization founded by incarcerated men in Washington state — and the Rev. Dr. Kelle Brown, senior pastor at Plymouth Church in downtown Seattle, who roused the crowd with forceful calls for economic justice.</p> <p>"We've got to support people living paycheck to paycheck, people living in cars, people living in places that aren't supposed to be habitable," she thundered. "Let freedom ring from the RVs and tents! From the Black Prisoners' Caucus! From where the elders live! Let freedom ring! Forward together, not one step back!"</p> <p>The crowd roared back — "forward together, not one step back!" — with loud applause and stomping feet. The march began.</p> <p>Many at the rally said they'd been marching every year for 10, 20, even 40 years.</p> <p>Fai Matthews, who lives in Rainier Beach, said for 40 years she's never missed a local King celebration.</p>

Now 70, Matthews was in fifth grade when King was killed. “It was devastating — there were only five Black students in the whole school,” she said. “It brings tears to my eyes even now to think about what happened. He was a man that worked so hard ... he wanted equal rights for everybody. That’s why it’s important for me to march every year and continue on that legacy.”

Marchers carried signs calling for climate justice, reform of juvenile-detention laws, the abolition of nuclear weapons — and the ubiquitous “Keep Moving Forward.”

What did that mean to people at the march?

“To me, it’s about more Black people being treated equally to white people,” said 13-year-old Rosie Sims, who attends Meany Middle School. For her father Milton Johnson, who works as a flagger on road-construction projects, it’s a call for economic opportunity. “You’ve got to give homeless people a place, and get people better jobs,” he said. “I live in a studio for \$1,200 a month — we need better opportunities to keep up with the rent, keep up with the economy.”

For 30-year-old Alicia Rodriguez, moving forward means recognizing the whole of King’s legacy. “A lot of people think Martin Luther King was just for Black people,” she said. “But he was for all the oppressed groups: people with disabilities, low-income people, Hispanic people. He was very supportive of Cesar Chavez.”

Andrew James, 62, said he was particularly concerned about education, and brought his teen daughters to learn more about civil rights — past and present.

“Our school system is not teaching them anything about our Black history,” he said. “I decided to bring my children with me to show them that we’re still fighting the fight.”

The march paused in front of the King County Juvenile Detention Center where Blaze Vincent — who’d entered the prison system at 17 and served 18 years, eventually joining the Black Prisoners’ Caucus — took the microphone.

“All this needs to change,” he told the crowd. “Our kids don’t need to be caged, they need to be cared for. We protest — but we have to push for policy changes. We’ve got to get engaged. We’re in a legislative session right now! Find out what district you’re in, decide what y’all want our city to be, our county to be. And then make us do it.”

A few steps away, toward the edge of the crowd, Tlingit elder Frieda Eide leaned on a cane, singing with her drum and dance group, which had accompanied the march from Garfield. For her, “keep moving forward” means doing what she’s been doing for years.

“We’re going to keep being Indigenous,” she said. “We’re going to support people who need it, and keep doing our thing — being together like this is good for us.”

She paused and looked around at the masses of people gathered for the march. “It’s good for all of us.”

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HEADLINE	01/16 China Covid deaths 1/10 <sup>th</sup> likely total toll?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/chinas-hospital-covid-death-data-just-a-10th-of-total-toll-experts-say/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/chinas-hospital-covid-death-data-just-a-10th-of-total-toll-experts-say/</a>
GIST	The nearly 60,000 COVID-related deaths China reported for the first five weeks of its current outbreak, the largest the world has ever seen, may underestimate the true toll by hundreds of thousands of fatalities, experts said.

China's abrupt pivot from "zero-COVID" in early December unleashed a surge of omicron infections and led to 59,938 virus-related deaths in the nation's hospitals through Jan. 12, the National Health Commission disclosed this weekend.

While the number swamps the few dozen deaths previously recorded in the official tally — which drew widespread criticism both at home and abroad, including from the World Health Organization — experts say it's still likely to be an underestimate given the enormous scale of the outbreak and the mortality rates seen at the height of omicron waves in other countries that initially pursued a "zero-COVID" strategy.

"This reported number of COVID-19 deaths might be the tip of the iceberg," said Zuo-Feng Zhang, chair of the department of epidemiology at the Fielding School of Public Health at University of California, Los Angeles.

While the figure is roughly in line with what Zhang estimated might be coming from the country's hospitals, he said it's only a fraction of the total COVID deaths across the country.

Using a report from the National School of Development at Peking University that found 64% of the population was infected by mid-January, he estimated 900,000 people would have died in the previous five weeks based on a conservative 0.1% case fatality rate. That means the official hospital death count is less than 7% of the total mortality seen during the outbreak.

The official toll translates to 1.17 deaths daily for every million people in the country over the course of five weeks, according to a Bloomberg analysis. That's well below the average daily mortality rate seen in other countries that initially pursued "zero-COVID" or managed to contain the virus after relaxing their pandemic rules.

When omicron hit South Korea, daily deaths quickly climbed to nearly seven for every 1 million people. Australia and New Zealand saw mortality nearing or topping four per million a day during their first winters with omicron. Even Singapore, which had a well-planned and gradual shift away from its zero tolerance approach, had deaths peak at about two per million people daily.

"These figures would suggest that China is having a very mild wave, with very few deaths per case," Louise Blair, head of vaccines and epidemiology at the London-based predictive health analytics firm Airfinity, said in an email. "It would be the lowest of any country/region abandoning a zero Covid policy."

It could be that many of the country's deaths occurred in nursing care facilities or at home, explaining some of the undercount, she said, as China's latest disclosure only counted hospital deaths. Reports of overwhelmed crematoriums around the country suggest excess mortality is at a high level.

The group currently estimates China's total COVID-related death count is about 390,000, with a potential range of 77,000 to 945,000 based on fatalities seen in other countries, she said.

WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus welcomed the new numbers from China, saying they allow for a better understanding of the situation and the potential impact of the COVID wave in China. He also asked the country to continue sharing such information and provide a more detailed breakdown of data by province over time.

China narrowed the definition of COVID mortality after it dismantled its zero tolerance approach, with health authorities asking hospitals to limit COVID deaths to those who died from respiratory failure after contracting the virus.

That led to a dearth of deaths reported throughout December and early January. Of the 60,000 COVID deaths disclosed over the weekend, a little more than 9% succumbed to respiratory failure, the NHC said. The rest died of underlying diseases following a COVID infection, the agency said.



	<p>The number of deaths is expected to increase as the virus continues its relentless trek across the country, since mortality tends to lag infections by a few weeks, officials said. The Lunar New Year Holiday, which starts Jan. 21 and involves millions of people traveling to their hometowns, could increase its spread, said Ali Mokdad, a professor at the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation and chief strategy officer for population health at the University of Washington.</p> <p>The group's modeling efforts forecast 1.2 million to 1.6 million deaths in China by the end of 2023, depending on what mitigation measures the country puts in place, Mokdad said.</p> <p>China is capable of accurately tracking COVID mortality despite the size of its current outbreak, UCLA's Zhang said, thanks to data from its public security, civil administration and hospital systems.</p> <p>"More detailed information and transparent data on China's coronavirus situation need to be shared with the World Health Organization, other countries and China's own people," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/17 China population falls; demographic crisis</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/business/china-birth-rate.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/business/china-birth-rate.html</a>
GIST	<p>HONG KONG — The world's most populous country has reached a pivotal moment: China's population has begun to shrink, after a steady, yearslong decline in its birthrate that experts say will be irreversible.</p> <p>The government said on Tuesday that 9.56 million people were born in China last year, while 10.41 million people died. It was the first time deaths had outnumbered births in China since the Great Leap Forward, Mao Zedong's failed economic experiment that led to widespread famine and death in the 1960s.</p> <p>Chinese officials have tried for years to slow down the arrival of this moment, loosening a one-child policy and offering incentives to encourage families to have children. None of those policies worked. Now, facing a population decline, coupled with a long-running rise in life expectancy, the country is being thrust into a demographic crisis that will have consequences not just for China and its economy but for the world.</p> <p>Over the last four decades, China emerged as an economic powerhouse and the world's factory floor. The country's transformation from widespread poverty to the world's second largest economy led to an increase in life expectancy that contributed to the current population decline — more people were getting older while fewer babies were being born.</p> <p>That trend has hastened another worrying event: the day when China will not have enough people of working age to fuel the high-speed growth that made it an engine of the global economy.</p> <p>"In the long run, we are going to see a China the world has never seen," said Wang Feng, a professor of sociology at the University of California at Irvine who specializes in China's demographics. "It will no longer be the young, vibrant, growing population. We will start to appreciate China, in terms of its population, as an old and shrinking population."</p> <p>Births were down from 10.6 million in 2021, the sixth straight year that the number had fallen, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. By 2035, 400 million people in China are expected to be over 60, accounting for nearly a third of its population. Labor shortages that will accompany China's rapidly aging population will also reduce tax revenue and contributions to a pension system that is already under enormous pressure.</p> <p>Whether or not the government can provide widespread access to elder care, medical services and a stable stream of income later in life will affect a long-held assumption that the Communist Party can provide a better life for its people.</p>

The news of China's population decline comes at a challenging time for the government in Beijing, which is dealing with the fallout from the sudden reversal last month of its zero-tolerance policy toward Covid.

The data on Tuesday showed a small increase in mortality last year, to 10.41 million deaths compared to around 10 million in recent years, raising questions about how a recent Covid surge may have contributed to the numbers.

Last week, officials unexpectedly revised the Covid death figures for the first month after reporting single-digit daily deaths for weeks. But experts have questioned the accuracy of the new figure — 60,000 deaths between Dec. 8 and Jan. 12.

On Tuesday, Kang Yi, the commissioner of the National Bureau of Statistics, said the Covid death figures for December had not yet been incorporated into the overall death totals for 2022.

China also on Tuesday released data that showed the depth of its economic challenges. The country's gross domestic product, the broadest measure of its commercial vitality, grew just 2.9 percent in the last three months of the year after widespread lockdowns and the recent surge in Covid infections. Over the whole year, China's economy grew only 3 percent, its slowest rate in nearly four decades.

This historical demographic moment was not unexpected. Chinese officials last year conceded that the country was on the verge of a population decline that would likely begin before 2025. But it came sooner than demographers, statisticians and China's ruling Communist Party had anticipated.

China has followed a trajectory familiar to many developing countries as their economies get richer — fertility rates fall as incomes rise and education levels increase. As the quality of life improves, people live longer.

"It's the kind of situation that economists dream of," said Philip O'Keefe, the director of the Aging Asia Research Hub, ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Aging Research.

But the government shortened its timeline to prepare for this moment by moving too slowly to loosen restrictive birth policies. "They could have given themselves a little more time," said Mr. O'Keefe.

Officials have taken several steps in recent years to try to slow the decline in births. In 2016, they relaxed the one-child policy that had been in place for 35 years, allowing families to have two children. In 2021, they raised the limit to three. Since then, Beijing has offered a range of incentives to couples and small families to encourage them to have children, including cash handouts, tax cuts and even property concessions.

China's situation is a stark contrast with India, whose total population is poised to exceed China's later this year, according to a recent estimate from the United Nations. But India's fertility rate is also declining rapidly.

Xi Jinping, China's top leader, recently made the country's demographic challenges a priority, pledging "a national policy system to boost birthrates." But in reality, experts said, China's plunging birth figures reveal an irreversible trend.

"The aggregate decline in population and decline in working-age population — both of those are irreversible," Mr. O'Keefe said. "I don't think there is a single country that has gone as low as China in terms of fertility rate and then bounced back to the replacement rate."

Together with Japan and South Korea, China has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world, below what demographers call the fertility replacement rate required for a population to grow. That figure would require every couple, on average, to have two children.

	<p>So far, the government's measures have failed to change the underlying fact that many young Chinese people simply do not want children. They often cite the increasingly high cost of raising them, especially with the economy in a precarious state.</p> <p>Rachel Zhang, a 33-year-old photographer in Beijing, decided before she married her husband that they would not have children. Sometimes, elders in the family nag them about having a baby.</p> <p>"I am firm about this," Ms. Zhang said. "I have never had the desire to have children all along." The rising costs of raising a child and finding an apartment in good school district have hardened her resolve.</p> <p>Other factors have contributed to such reluctance to have more children, including the burden that many younger adults face in taking care of aging parents and grandparents.</p> <p>China's strict "zero Covid" policy — nearly three years of mass testing, quarantines and lockdowns, resulting in some families being separated for long periods of time — may have led even more people to decide against having children.</p> <p>Luna Zhu, 28, and her husband have parents who are willing to take care of their grandchildren. And she works for a state-owned enterprise that provides a good maternity leave package. But Ms. Zhu, who got married five years ago, is not interested.</p> <p>"Especially the past three years of the epidemic, I feel that many things are so hard," Ms. Zhu said.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/17 China economy stumbles amid lockdowns</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/business/china-gdp-fourth-quarter-2022.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/business/china-gdp-fourth-quarter-2022.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>The Chinese economy had one of its worst performances in decades last year as growth was dragged down by numerous Covid lockdowns followed by a deadly outbreak in December that swept across the country with remarkable speed.</p> <p>China grew 3 percent for the year, numbers released Tuesday show, well less than half the level in 2021 and short of Beijing's target of 5.5 percent. Other than 2020, it was the most disappointing showing since 1976, the year Mao Zedong died, when the economy declined 1.6 percent.</p> <p>The government's strict "zero Covid" restrictions cast a pall over 2022, strangling the economy with frequent quarantines, regional lockdowns and massive spending to pay for widespread testing. Then on Dec. 7, China lifted the policy without warning after nearly three years. Within weeks, the virus had infected hundreds of millions of people, killed many older residents and left factories, offices and restaurants bereft of workers and customers.</p> <p>The policy reversal by Xi Jinping, China's top leader, has sparked hope that the economy will regain its footing this spring. Whether it does is of great significance to the world. China's consumers are an almost irreplaceable source of revenue for homegrown and foreign companies. Its factories produce a greater share of the world's manufacturing output than the United States, Germany and Japan combined. The Chinese Communist Party has depended on growth for political legitimacy.</p> <p>Despite the blow inflicted by "zero Covid," China appears to have grown faster last year than major rivals like the United States, Japan and Germany, all of which are estimated by economists to have expanded less than 2 percent last year.</p> <p>In the decade before the pandemic, China's economy was one of the world's most dynamic, growing an average of 7.7 percent a year. In the last three months of 2022 growth sputtered to 2.9 percent according to the official data, a come down from the previous quarter.</p>

Many economists cautioned that China might have exaggerated the level of activity in the last three months of the year. Capital Economics, a London research firm, did its own calculation from detailed government statistics by industry and found growth added up to 0.5 percent, not 2.9 percent.

Goldman Sachs economists expressed skepticism about the government's numbers for December, which were much stronger than expected even though daily indicators like subway usage had previously showed that many Chinese stayed home last month as they fell sick or hid from the virus. "It is very surprising in our view that the reported numbers for December were not worse, given the large Covid wave in the month," Goldman said in a research note.

Chinese officials insist that the economy will rebound after infections peak. Traffic jams have reappeared and subway trains are increasingly full in Beijing and Shanghai. Shops along Shanghai's famous Nanjing Road, the Fifth Avenue of China, are no longer empty. The domestic terminals of big Chinese airports are crowded with travelers. The optimism is reflected in China's stock markets, which have risen in recent weeks.

But the path ahead is deeply uncertain. Large parts of China's population, especially the elderly, are not fully vaccinated, leaving a heightened risk of new Covid variants. The economy's property sector, ordinarily a key driver of wealth, is weighed down by enormous corporate debt. And the nation's population has begun to shrink, the government said Tuesday, after a yearslong fall in its birthrate.

Many economists are already writing off January and probably February as well. Vast numbers of workers have already headed to their hometowns for Lunar New Year celebrations, in many cases for the first time in three years. Nobody knows when they will trickle back to cities for work.

The economic scars of "zero Covid" are visible in Yiwu, a once bustling river town of light industry and wholesale markets in southeastern China. In interviews there this month, nearly a dozen residents said that even as December's wave of cases seems to be abating, the damage lingers.

Yiwu endured a hard, 10-day lockdown in August to snuff out a 500-case virus outbreak, only to suffer a wave of cases in mid-December when the "zero Covid" measures were lifted.

Today, eateries are only a third full and many have closed permanently. Many shops were almost empty when they should have been bustling with people buying gifts ahead of Lunar New Year celebrations set to begin this weekend.

Yuan Hao, the owner of a flower shop no bigger than a walk-in closet, said that in some of the storefronts near him, several businesses opened and then quickly closed in the past year. Merchants found that almost nobody was spending money. And now almost no one is buying flowers for the Lunar New Year, he said.

"All the money we earn has been spent and there is no way to save more money," he said.

Jin Weiying runs a storefront wholesale business that sells Lunar New Year decorations and accessories. But his customers — retailers from all over China — are ordering fewer supplies than usual and are demanding deep discounts.

"In the good old days, it was normal to have clients ordering eight or ten boxes per deal, but now they only order two or three sets," Mr. Jin said. "Even if it's back to normal, the common people have no money in their hands."

Retail sales in China fell 1.8 percent in December compared with the same month in 2021, the National Bureau of Statistics said, despite a leap of 39.8 percent for the retail sales of medicine as people stocked up amid the Covid outbreak. To revive spending by consumers, China must repair their confidence. The government's index of consumer confidence fell last month to the lowest level measured in more than three decades.

Much of the money households saved during lockdowns is sitting in fixed-deposit accounts, locked in for longer periods of time. What's more, a central bank survey of urban depositors found last month that record numbers of Chinese plan to increase their savings, a trend that could dampen consumption at least in the near term.

Another difficulty for policymakers in Beijing is that foreign demand has fallen. Higher interest rates imposed by the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks have dampened other countries' economies and lessened their appetite for imports from China.

Chinese officials announced on Friday that exports fell 9.9 percent in December relative to a year earlier, including nose-dives of 19.5 percent to the United States and 17.5 percent to countries in the European Union.

In Yiwu, thousands of foreign buyers used to visit the blocks-long export wholesale market. But most were unable to visit after China closed its borders in March 2020, just a few months into the pandemic. Many have looked for suppliers elsewhere.

One of the companies with sales offices at the Yiwu export market is Tian Cheng Glass, which manufactures pitchers and cups, mainly for customers in the Middle East. Tian Cheng had about \$10 million a year in sales before the pandemic, said Zheng Xiaohong, the company's retail manager. Now they are less than half that.

"It was much better in 2019, and you would meet random foreigners then," she said, standing in a deserted stall at the export market, surrounded by shelves covered in glassware. "Then they did not come here."

While many local governments have gone deeply into debt, new connections among neighborhoods and cities may make China even more competitive. Yiwu, for example, has opened its first two light rail lines in the past six months. Nationwide infrastructure spending jumped 9.4 percent last year.

The national government has also begun bailing out China's real estate sector with lines of credit from state banks. Construction has finished at some of the country's many apartment complexes where work had stalled.

The speed with which Covid raced through the country in the past month has been a public health disaster for China. Some analysts hope that high rates of infection, barring more outbreaks, could help move the economy forward by leaving the overall population more resilient to becoming seriously ill.

Wang Xiongfeng, a 46-year-old Yiwu resident, said that he and many other people he knew in Yiwu got sick in mid-December. But they had mostly recovered and resumed living their lives more as they did before the pandemic.

Mr. Wang said that he expected more foreign buyers to come soon to Yiwu to place orders for exports, and for the city's economy to start reviving. "Things will get better," he predicted.

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HEADLINE	01/17 Renewed Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/world/europe/armenia-azerbaijan-russia-nagorno.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/world/europe/armenia-azerbaijan-russia-nagorno.html</a>
GIST	<p>In late 2020, when President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia brokered the end of a war in the Caucasus between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and placed 2,000 Russian peacekeeping troops between the two sides, it looked like <a href="#">a strategic masterstroke</a>.</p> <p>The <a href="#">deal</a> gave Russia a military presence in one post-Soviet country, Azerbaijan, while deepening the reliance of another, Armenia, on Russia as a guarantor of its security. It positioned Mr. Putin as a peacemaker and seemed to affirm his claim to Russia's rightful influence, as the only power capable of keeping stability throughout the former Soviet sphere.</p>

Barely two years later, the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan is [heating up again](#), and Russia, distracted and weakened by the war in Ukraine, has not stepped in. Defying the Russian presence, Azerbaijanis are testing whether Moscow is still able and determined to impose its will on other, smaller neighbors amid its struggles in Ukraine.

Since Dec. 12, the mountain road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia has been blocked amid protests by Azerbaijani activists claiming to be opposing illegal mining operations in the area.

Azerbaijan's government has endorsed the protests; Armenians say Azerbaijan engineered them and criticize Russian peacekeepers for not keeping the road open.

"It can be seen that Russia's resources in the region are becoming limited," said Farhad Mammadov, a pro-government analyst in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. "Russia is becoming weaker."

The roadblocks are a new escalation in the bloody, [decades-old dispute](#) over an enclave home to tens of thousands of ethnic Armenians within Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, supermarkets are stocked with little but alcohol and candy, and supplies of diapers and basic medicine are so low that residents post on Facebook in search of them, according to Tatev Azizyan, a local journalist. Starting Friday, people will have to present ration cards to buy rice, pasta, buckwheat or sugar.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reshaped relations around the globe, perhaps nowhere more clearly than on the boundary between Europe and Asia, strengthening the hands of Turkey and Iran, now important sources of trade and weapons for Moscow, while undermining Russian influence in the Caucasus.

Armenia is part of the Russian-led military alliance of six post-Soviet countries, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and hosts a Russian military base. But so far, the Kremlin, with its hands full in Ukraine, has not taken action to aid its ally.

"The whole concentration of attention on Ukraine makes the situation more fragile and gives a new opportunity to Azerbaijan to use force and be more aggressive," Vahan Kostanyan, an adviser to Armenia's foreign minister, said in a recent interview.

Armenia won a war against Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh in the early 1990s, giving it control of some 13 percent of Azerbaijan's total land area, including Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan won much of it back when it launched an offensive in 2020, taking advantage of its natural gas profits to buy superior weaponry from Turkey and Israel.

The recent war ended after 44 days with the cease-fire negotiated by Mr. Putin, and Russian troops were deployed to protect the Armenians remaining in and around Stepanakert, the region's biggest city, and the road connecting it to Armenia.

Now, some Armenians believe, Azerbaijan is intent on starving them out with the roadblocks. "This is so that we leave our homeland," Ms. Azizyan, the journalist in Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh, said in a phone interview. "That is their goal."

President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan said last week that "whoever does not want to become our citizen, the road is not closed; it is open. They can leave whenever they want."

Russia's leverage is waning in both countries. In Azerbaijan, the Ukraine invasion turned public opinion further against Russia and its peacekeeping contingent, said Zaur Shiriye, a Crisis Group analyst in Baku. In Armenia, Russia's military support looks less advantageous, with Russia no longer a prolific exporter of weaponry — it needs it in Ukraine — and with Mr. Putin keen to preserve close ties with Turkey, Azerbaijan's main ally.



Tigran Grigoryan, an Armenian political analyst, said the war in Ukraine had “created an environment in which the Russian deterrent isn’t working in the region.”

There is little clarity on how the current crisis can be resolved. Azerbaijan insists it has not imposed a blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh, and that humanitarian and medical traffic is being let through. But on the ground, the situation appears increasingly dire for Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh who are stranded with limited food and other essentials, and cut off from family members who were in Armenia when the crisis began.

Ms. Azizyan said she recently braved a six-hour line at an A.T.M., and that things as simple as oranges, cheese or fever-reducing drugs have become prized possessions. Kindergartens are closed, she said, because of a lack of food.

After Russian peacekeeping troops were filmed recently handing out humanitarian aid outside a local maternity clinic, residents split into two camps on social media, she said: some thanked the Russians, while others asked why they weren’t doing more.

“No one understands,” Ms. Azizyan said, why Russia is not able to reopen the road. “People have started to get angry and to express their indignation toward the peacekeepers.”

While Azerbaijan won the 2020 war, it still has not achieved all its aims, including a transportation corridor to the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan, a separate slice of Azerbaijani territory on Armenia’s southwestern border, that would give the country a direct link to Turkey. It is also seeking to exert greater control over the road that is now being blocked, known as the Lachin Corridor, claiming that Armenia is using it to illegally transport land mines into the territory.

Russia has been trying to tread a middle path amid the escalation. While Armenia is a military ally, Mr. Aliyev has developed a close relationship with Mr. Putin, and both countries are important economic partners for Russia amid Western sanctions.

“We call on the Azerbaijani and Armenian sides to demonstrate good will and to seek compromises together,” Maria V. Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s spokeswoman, said last week.

The Kremlin continues to keep a hand in the negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and Mr. Putin spoke with Mr. Aliyev and with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia in December in St. Petersburg. In televised remarks at his meeting with Mr. Putin, Mr. Pashinyan noted with apparent frustration that “it turns out that the Lachin Corridor is not under the control of Russian peacekeepers.”

Last week, Mr. Pashinyan went further in pushing back against Moscow, canceling planned military drills in Armenia this year by the Russia-led alliance.

“Russia’s military presence in Armenia not only fails to guarantee its security, but it raises security threats for Armenia,” Mr. Pashinyan said, according to The Associated Press.

But analysts say that there is little chance that Armenia will be able to disentangle itself from its reliance on Russia anytime soon — the latest in a series of lessons for post-Soviet countries about the difficulty of moving out of Moscow’s security shadow, especially when instability threatens. In Belarus in 2020 and Kazakhstan last year, leaders of former Soviet countries turned to Mr. Putin for help in the face of popular uprisings, reinforcing his sway over both nations.

“Armenia has a massive strategic problem,” said Thomas de Waal, a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe who has studied the conflict for decades. Mr. Pashinyan “would like a much more balanced foreign policy, and yet he’s stuck with Russia as his main military-political ally.”

Still, with Moscow distracted, the European Union and the United States have heightened their own efforts to broker a lasting peace and to build their influence in the Caucasus. Mr. Pashinyan and Mr. Aliyev met

	<p>last August and last October in meetings arranged by the European Union, and the two countries' foreign ministers met in Washington in November.</p> <p>Analysts described the dual negotiating tracks as unusual — one led by Russia, the other by the E.U., at a time when Moscow and the West are locked in their most intense conflict in decades. But the E.U.'s special representative for the southern Caucasus, Toivo Klaar, said in an interview that he has been in contact with his Russian counterpart, the diplomat Igor Khovayev, and held two in-person meetings with him last fall.</p> <p>“In the current circumstances there's potentially more space for Armenia and Azerbaijan to actually overcome their conflict,” Mr. Klaar said. “The question is whether they're able to seize that opportunity.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Ukraine prepares for new offensive</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/ukraine-russian-belarus-renewed-offensive-war-invasion-border-rcna64858">https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/ukraine-russian-belarus-renewed-offensive-war-invasion-border-rcna64858</a>
GIST	<p>DNIPROVS'KE, Ukraine — The smell of sawdust hangs in the air around a network of neatly dug trenches in a quiet and densely forested area on Ukraine's border with Belarus.</p> <p>Freshly cut planks reinforce the 5-foot-high earth walls in the channels crisscrossing the forest floor. Every few meters, logs across the top form a kind of shelter, the makeshift roof covered in branches and earth for camouflage.</p> <p>Ukraine is preparing for battle in this quiet forest clearing less than five minutes driving from the border with Russia's close ally. Originally built in April, Ukrainian forces continue to update and strengthen defenses such as these trenches, amid reports of Russian troops and armor pouring into Belarus.</p> <p>On Monday, Belarus and Russia began joint military exercises, adding to fears that Moscow will use its ally to launch a new ground offensive, as it did the invasion in February. Air force drills will be held until Feb. 1 using all of Belarus' military airfields and joint army exercises involving a “mechanized brigade subdivision,” the Belarusian defense ministry said.</p> <p>Standing next to an empty trench, Sr. Lt. Anton knows that he and his men have to be on high alert — the next attack could strike anywhere along front lines stretching thousands of miles.</p> <p>“In all areas of our responsibility we are building these fortifications to be able to defend and mount counter offensives clandestinely,” the 32-year-old a father of four and a former civilian border guard said. “The potential offensive from the Belarusian side could come from anywhere. That's why we are getting ready for all scenarios.”</p> <p>The officer uses only his first name because he is on active duty, a reflection of the heightened security along the border. Another is that the soldiers who built the trenches were temporarily cleared from the area before NBC News's arrival for security reasons.</p> <p>Passing through the city of Chernihiv, jittery police demanded identification papers from NBC News. More military personnel than civilians appeared to be on the streets.</p> <p>Still, a Russian push is more likely to come from occupied territory in the east, Vadym Skibitsky, Ukraine's deputy military intelligence chief, told NBC News.</p> <p>“We are now focused on the reserves and groupings of troops that Russia is putting in the temporarily occupied territories. We're talking about the winter spring period, in three main directions: Donbas, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia,” Skibitsky said on Thursday.</p> <p>Across the Dnipro river from Belarus, not far from the trenches, Ukrainian forces are taking no chances.</p>

A vast bridge between the two countries plunged into the icy water below, having been blown up by Kyiv's forces to stymie Russia's advance shortly after the February invasion.

Expecting an easy win, Moscow's poorly prepared troops were humiliated by a fierce Ukrainian counteroffensive, and 10 months on, Russian forces have struggled to hold onto and expand the territories they had seized.

Anton pointed to fortifications built by Russian and Belarusian troops on the other side. A few feet away, a soldier stood in a foxhole on the Ukrainian bank of the river, staring at Moscow's close ally across the water.

Expectations have since grown that Russian President Vladimir Putin will soon order a renewed push to break the stalemate.

Russia said it had captured the eastern town on Soledar on Friday, its only breakthrough since the summer, although Ukrainian forces say they are still holding the line.

The Russian advance came at a terrible human cost, with Ukrainian officials describing wave after wave of poorly equipped soldiers hurled at their defenses.

Kyiv is now warning of another major mobilization of Russian men to replace those lost, and pierce further into Ukrainian territory.

"According to our intelligence estimates, the Russian Federation will create an armed force of two million people," Skibitsky said, giving no timeframe.

On Dec. 30, Ukrainian Defense Ministry Oleksii Reznikov warned that martial law would be declared in early January and that borders would be tightened to stop an outflow of Russian men.

That has not yet materialized. In early December, Putin said there was no need for a further mobilization after drafting some 300,000 men.

Experts such as Frank Ledwidge, a lecturer in military strategy at the University of Portsmouth in Britain and a former military intelligence officer, say Ukrainian predictions of tens of thousands more Russians being thrown into battle should be taken seriously.

"I have no doubt whatsoever that Ukrainian military intelligence has pretty good sources, and they wouldn't be declaring this unless they had some pretty good reason for doing so. So I think something is going to happen," Ledwidge said.

However, such a move was unlikely to tip the balance of the war in Russia's favor, he said.

Ledwidge and other military experts say Russia is fast running out of supplies of armored vehicles and other materiel and describe poor training and low morale in Moscow's army.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian troops are NATO trained and are receiving increasingly better weapons from Western allies.

Earlier this month, the U.S. announced a \$3.75 billion aid package for Ukraine and other countries affected by Russia's invasion of its neighbor, including Bradley fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, artillery systems and surface to air missiles.

"People say that quantity has a quality all its own," Ledwidge said, referring to Russia's strategy of mobilizing vast numbers of men.

	“It doesn’t, unless you can apply that quantity efficiently and preferably place it inside some form of armored protection, which at the moment the Russians don’t seem to be able to do.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Belarus, Russia launch joint air drills</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/politics-belarus-government-alexander-lukashenko-business-78bafa56ab2dc7086b7e496829fcc4f4">https://apnews.com/article/politics-belarus-government-alexander-lukashenko-business-78bafa56ab2dc7086b7e496829fcc4f4</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — Russia and Belarus on Monday launched joint air force drills, an exercise that underlines close defense ties between the two allies amid the fighting in neighboring Ukraine.</p> <p>The Belarusian Defense Ministry said that Russia has deployed its warplanes to Belarus for the maneuvers, which will last until Feb. 1. It noted that all of the country’s air bases and firing ranges will be involved in the drills.</p> <p>The exercise will feature joint air patrols, action to support ground forces, airborne operations, air reconnaissance and transport flights, the ministry said. It didn’t mention the number of aircraft that will be involved in the drills.</p> <p>Last year, Russia and Belarus announced a plan to modernize Belarusian aircraft to make them nuclear-capable, and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said in December that Belarusian crews were training with Russia to operate those planes, which would need to be modified to carry nuclear weapons.</p> <p>Russian troops used the territory of Belarus to roll into Ukraine from the north on Feb. 24. Ukraine says that it has maintained forces alongside the country’s border with Belarus to fend off any potential incursions in the future.</p> <p>The Pentagon said last week that it hadn’t seen any Russian troop movement in Belarus that would indicate an imminent attack.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Analysts: Russia preparing long war</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-business-89f2c26719d4d1930ebf64fe02289334">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-business-89f2c26719d4d1930ebf64fe02289334</a>
GIST	<p>DNIPRO, Ukraine (AP) — The death toll from <a href="#">a weekend Russian missile strike</a> on an apartment building in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro has risen to 40, authorities said Monday, as Western analysts pointed to indications the Kremlin was preparing for a drawn-out war in Ukraine after almost <a href="#">11 months of fighting</a>.</p> <p>About 1,700 people lived in the multistory building, and search and rescue crews have worked nonstop since Saturday’s strike to locate victims and survivors in the wreckage. The regional administration said 39 people have been rescued so far and 30 more remained missing. Authorities said at least 75 were wounded.</p> <p>The reported death toll made it the deadliest single attack on Ukrainian civilians since before the summer, according to <a href="#">The Associated Press-Frontline War Crimes Watch project</a>. Residents said the apartment tower did not house any military facilities.</p> <p>Oleksander Anyskevych said he was in his apartment when the missile struck.</p> <p>“Boom — and that’s it. We saw that we were alive and that’s all,” Anyskevych said Monday as he went to the site to see his wrecked apartment.</p> <p>He told The Associated Press that he knew people who died under the rubble. One of his son’s classmates lost her parents.</p>

Dnipro residents took flowers, candles and toys to the ruins.

“All of us could be in that place,” local resident Iryna Skrypnyk said.

The European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, called the strike, and others like it, “inhumane aggression” because it directly targeted civilians. “There will be no impunity for these crimes,” he said in a tweet Sunday.

Asked about the strike Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Russian military doesn’t target residential buildings and suggested the Dnipro building was hit as a result of Ukrainian air defense actions.

The [strike on the building](#) came amid a wider barrage of Russian cruise missiles across Ukraine. The Ukrainian military said Sunday that it did not have the means to intercept the type of Russian missile that hit the residential building in Dnipro.

Fierce fighting continued to rage Monday in Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk province, where military analysts have said both sides are likely suffering heavy [troop casualties](#). No independent verification of developments was possible.

Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk province make up the Donbas, an expansive industrial region bordering Russia that Russian President Vladimir Putin identified as a focus from the war’s outset. Moscow-backed separatists have been fighting Kyiv’s forces there since 2014.

The Russian and Belarusian air forces began [a joint exercise](#) Monday in Belarus, which borders Ukraine and served as a staging ground for Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine. The drills are set to run through Feb. 1, the Belarusian Defense Ministry said. Russia has sent its warplanes to Belarus for the drills.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, reported signs of the Kremlin taking steps to turn its Ukraine invasion into “a major conventional war” after months of embarrassing military reversals.

What Moscow calls “a special military operation” aimed to capture the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, within weeks and to install a Kremlin-friendly regime there, but Russian forces ultimately withdrew from around Kyiv, the think tank said. Then came a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in recent months before the onset of winter slowed military advances.

“The Kremlin is likely preparing to conduct a decisive strategic action in the next six months intended to regain the initiative and end Ukraine’s current string of operational successes,” the Institute for the Study of War said in a report late Sunday.

It noted reports indicating the Russian military command was in “serious preparations” for an expanded mobilization effort, conserving mobilized personnel for future use, while seeking to boost military industrial production and [reshuffling its command structure](#).

That means Ukraine’s Western allies “will need to continue supporting Ukraine in the long run,” the think tank said.

NATO member nations have sought in recent days to reassure Ukraine that they will stay the course. The United Kingdom has [pledged tanks](#) and the U.S. military’s new, [expanded combat training of Ukrainian forces](#) began in Germany on Sunday.

Poland’s prime minister on Monday [urged the German government](#) to supply a wide range of weapons to Kyiv and voiced hope that Berlin would soon approve a transfer of battle tanks.

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/levant-turkey/1673869092-tensions-rise-between-sweden-and-turkey-over-nato-bid">https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/levant-turkey/1673869092-tensions-rise-between-sweden-and-turkey-over-nato-bid</a>
GIST	<p>What is developing into a real diplomatic crisis had started with this effigy: a puppet resembling Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan hanging from its feet outside Stockholm city hall.</p> <p>The footage was shared last week by the so-called Swedish Solidarity Committee for Rojava, alluding to the Kurdish-areas in Northern Syria that Turkey threatened to target in a new offensive. Turkey's reaction was quick to come. A Swedish ambassador to Ankara was summoned to the foreign ministry, and a visit of the Swedish speaker of parliament was canceled.</p> <p>"As of now, this visit will not take place and if they don't intervene in this situation in Sweden, this could further strain ties with Sweden," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.</p> <p>Stockholm is trying to control the damage the puppet has caused. Only in May, Sweden together with Finland had submitted a bid to join NATO after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year. But it needs Ankara's support.</p> <p>"We see it as an act of sabotage against our applications to become members of NATO, both for Sweden and Finland. I can clearly see why Turkey is outraged. We would show the same reaction if this was aimed at a Swedish leader. So, I have all respect for this, and we've established this very clearly with our channels with Turkey," said Ulf Kristersson, Swedish Prime Minister.</p> <p>"This visit was postponed, but I hope that we will be able to carry it out within a short period of time," he added.</p> <p>Protesters gathered in front of the Swedish embassy in Ankara after the footage became public. Turkey has also announced a probe into the incident and is accusing Sweden of not taking enough action against militant Kurdish groups and especially the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK), which it blames for a 2016 coup attempt.</p> <p>Erdogan on Saturday called upon Sweden to extradite 130 individuals whom he called 'terrorists'. Last June, Sweden, Finland and Turkey had signed a memorandum where the two Nordic countries vowed to take steps to meet Turkey's security concerns. But as the quarrel simmers, Sweden's NATO membership is receding into the distance.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Russia: UK tanks 'will burn' in Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://news.yahoo.com/russia-says-british-tanks-sent-095937902.html">https://news.yahoo.com/russia-says-british-tanks-sent-095937902.html</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (Reuters) - The Kremlin said on Monday that tanks Britain plans to send to Ukraine "will burn", warning the West that supplying a new round of more advanced weapons to Ukraine would not change the outcome of the war.</p> <p>Since President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, the United States and its allies have given tens of billions of dollars' worth of weaponry including rocket systems, drones, armoured vehicles and communications systems.</p> <p>Britain said on Saturday it would send 14 of its Challenger 2 main battle tanks as well as other advanced artillery support in the coming weeks.</p> <p>"They are using this country [Ukraine] as a tool to achieve their anti-Russian goals," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said when asked about the British tanks.</p> <p>"These tanks are burning and will burn just like the rest," Peskov said.</p>



Peskov said the new supplies from countries like Britain and Poland would not change the situation on the ground, but were an attempt to draw out the conflict which he said would ultimately bring "more troubles" on Ukraine.

Putin said in an interview aired on Sunday that the military operation in Ukraine had gained positive momentum and that he hoped his soldiers would deliver more wins after Russia claimed control of the eastern Ukrainian salt-mining town of Soledar.

The Kremlin chief now casts the war in Ukraine as an existential battle with an aggressive and arrogant West, and has said that Russia will use all available means to protect itself and its people against any enemy.

The United States and its allies have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an imperial-style land grab, while Ukraine has vowed to fight until the last Russian soldier is ejected from its territory.

Vladimir Solovyev, a pro-Kremlin presenter on Rossiya 1 state television, said any Western countries which supplied more advanced weapons to Ukraine should be considered legitimate targets for Russia.

"De-facto, Britain has entered the war," Solovyev told his flagship Sunday night talk show on state television. "I consider Britain is now a legitimate target for us."

His comments were followed by a discussion on state television with lawmaker Andrei Gurulyev about the utility of resuming Russia nuclear testing so that the whole world "shuddered", and even of wiping out Britain.

"If there is no London, then we would have victory," Gurulyev said. "On Britain, I said six months ago that it should be wiped from the face of the earth."

Ukraine's allies are due to meet in Ramstein, Germany on Friday to discuss providing it with more arms. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is under pressure to allow the export of Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine by Germany, which makes them, and other countries that have them.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Forecasters didn't see Calif. rains coming</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.msn.com/en-us/weather/topstories/in-california-a-drought-turned-to-floods-forecasters-didn-t-see-it-coming/ar-AA16n82L">https://www.msn.com/en-us/weather/topstories/in-california-a-drought-turned-to-floods-forecasters-didn-t-see-it-coming/ar-AA16n82L</a>
GIST	<p>Coming into this winter, California was mired in a three-year drought, with forecasts offering little hope of relief anytime soon. Fast forward to today, and the state is waterlogged with as much as 10 to 20 inches of rain and up to 200 inches of snow that have fallen in some locations in the past three weeks. <a href="#">The drought isn't over</a>, but parched farmland and declining reservoir levels have been supplanted by raging rivers and deadly flooding.</p> <p>The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) issues seasonal forecasts of precipitation and temperature for one to 13 months into the future. The CPC's initial outlook for this winter, <a href="#">issued on Oct. 20</a>, favored below-normal precipitation in Southern California and did not lean toward either drier- or wetter-than-normal conditions in Northern California.</p> <p>However, after a series of intense moisture-laden storms known as atmospheric rivers, most of California has seen rainfall totals <a href="#">200 to 600 percent above normal</a> over the past month, with <a href="#">24 trillion gallons of water</a> having fallen in the state since late December.</p> <p>The stark contrast between the staggering amount of precipitation in recent weeks and the CPC's seasonal precipitation outlook issued before the winter, which leaned toward below-normal precipitation for at least half of California, has water managers lamenting the unreliability of seasonal forecasts.</p>

“You have no idea come Dec. 1 what your winter is going to look like because our seasonal forecasts are so bad,” said Jeffrey Mount, a senior fellow with the Public Policy Institute of California’s Water Policy Center, in an interview. “They are just not reliable enough to make definitive water supply decisions.”  
An evolving forecast

The CPC’s seasonal and monthly outlooks do not provide specific forecasts of precipitation amounts, but rather the probability that precipitation will be above or below average. Such information is intended to “help communities prepare for what is likely to come in the months ahead and minimize weather’s impacts on lives and livelihoods,” NOAA stated in [its winter outlook](#).

The precipitation forecast for California remained virtually unchanged in the CPC’s [Nov. 17 update](#) to the winter outlook. That forecast called for a 33 to 50 percent chance of below-normal precipitation in the southern half of California, and equal chances of precipitation being above or below normal in the northern half of the state.

CPC Director David DeWitt said the outlook was heavily influenced by the expected continuation of La Niña conditions. El Niño and La Niña — the cyclical warming and cooling of the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean that influences weather patterns around the globe — often have an outsize effect on prevailing seasonal conditions in many parts of the world.

“Forecasting on a seasonal time scale is dominated by the El Niño/La Niña cycle,” DeWitt said in an interview. “La Niña conditions are generally characterized or associated with below-normal precipitation for central and Southern California. Northern California is kind of a dice roll.”

Back in mid-November, [chances were seen as high](#) that La Niña would continue for a third winter in a row, which it has thus far, although it [appears to be weakening](#). In both of the two previous “[three-peat](#)” La Niña winters since 1950, much of California recorded below-normal precipitation.

Despite their typically strong influence on seasonal conditions, El Niño and La Niña aren’t the only game in town. They can be counteracted by other large-scale atmospheric phenomena that evolve on shorter time scales. One such factor is a cluster of storms in the tropics, known as the [Madden-Julian Oscillation](#), that travels around the globe approximately every 30 to 60 days.

While such factors “can leave a big imprint on average winter conditions ... they’re very difficult to predict more than a few weeks in advance,” wrote Nat Johnson, a researcher and meteorologist with the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory at Princeton, in a [blog post](#) about NOAA’s winter outlook.

As these additional factors started to come into focus in mid-December, the CPC began to shift its forecast for California. For example, its monthly precipitation outlook for January, [issued on Dec. 15](#), showed a smaller portion of the state expected to see below-normal precipitation.

The first signs of above-normal precipitation for California did not appear until Dec. 19, when CPC issued its precipitation outlook for the next eight to 14 days. [That outlook](#), which covered the period from Dec. 27 to Jan. 2, called for a 33 to 70 percent chance of above-normal precipitation across all of California, with the highest chances in the northern part of the state.

“Those day eight-to-14 products are really generally going to have much higher skill than a monthly or seasonal outlook because of that shorter time scale,” DeWitt said.

On Dec. 31, with what would become a weeks-long drenching already underway, CPC issued a [monthly precipitation outlook](#) suggesting the wet weather could continue through January.

#### **‘Can’t rely’ on long-range forecast**

Experts say that seasonal precipitation outlooks should be viewed with caution, and not interpreted as weather forecasts.

“They are meant to show end users how the odds are stacked one way or another for wet, dry or normal conditions based on all relevant available information at the start of the water year,” Michael DeFlorio, a research analyst with the Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, wrote in an email.

Such outlooks are particularly difficult for California, which experiences wild year-to-year swings between wet and dry conditions.

“California receives a large fraction of its annual precipitation from a small number of intense storms, often in the form of atmospheric rivers,” Johnson wrote in an email. “That means that California’s seasonal-to-annual precipitation totals can be significantly influenced by the chaotic weather variability that occurs only within a few days.”

The winter guessing game has been a long-standing challenge for state officials and water managers who need to make decisions about how much water to allocate to farms and cities, plan reservoir and dam releases, and prepare for effects on agricultural production and hydropower generation.

Climate change has made the task even more complicated, because historical experience may no longer be a useful guide for estimating the severity of droughts and floods.

“Conditions are shifting,” Mount said. “What we’re seeing in long-term trends is drier dry periods and wetter wet periods.”

At the local level, agencies may use seasonal outlooks for background guidance but not necessarily for critical decisions.

“We plan to be able to manage anything that comes our way,” said Willie Whittlesey, general manager for the Yuba Water Agency, which manages flood risk and water supply on the Yuba River northeast of Sacramento, in an interview. “Even during La Niña, you can have significant storms at the watershed level — you really can’t rely on the general longer-range forecast for watershed management.”

### **Pathways to better precipitation forecasts**

[Ongoing research](#) at Scripps Institution of Oceanography is aiming to improve shorter-range forecasts for atmospheric rivers. This winter, data from reconnaissance flights into these sprawling storms has been fed into forecast models in real time, helping to boost their accuracy at the five- to 10-day range, and possibly beyond that, Whittlesey said. Researchers also are tackling the problem of predicting extreme rainfall with new tools, such as [artificial intelligence](#).

However, the known gap in subseasonal-to-seasonal prediction remains.

“Precipitation forecasts beyond two weeks are inherently valuable to society,” DeWitt said. “They have inherently low skill because of the state of the science.”

To improve precipitation forecasts, DeWitt points to the importance of programs that span from research to operations, such as NOAA’s Precipitation Prediction Grand Challenge. That program’s [strategy](#) aims to provide more accurate precipitation forecasts — at time scales from a day to a decade — by addressing major gaps in observations of the atmosphere, reducing model errors and developing products that more effectively communicate the forecast.

“We continue to pursue getting that program funded at a sufficient and sustained level because that is what it’s going to take. ... That will accelerate our ability to improve precipitation forecasts for stakeholders,” DeWitt said.

As evidence of what the Precipitation Prediction Grand Challenge could accomplish, DeWitt cites the success of NOAA’s Hurricane Forecast Improvement Program, a research-to-operations program that

	<p>began in 2009. The program <a href="#">achieved its original goal</a> of reducing hurricane track and intensity errors by 20 percent in five years and continues to strive for further increases in hurricane forecast accuracy.</p> <p>“We would like to do the same thing for precipitation forecasts across time scales, but especially on the subseasonal-to-seasonal time scales,” Dewitt said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Europe’s warm winter trumps Putin’s hand</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/europe/europe-putin-warm-winter-intl">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/europe/europe-putin-warm-winter-intl</a>
GIST	<p>Ever since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to invade <a href="#">Ukraine</a>, one question has troubled European governments more than almost any other: What happens if Moscow turns off the gas?</p> <p>The threat of cutting Russian gas supplies for European countries, many of whom have relied on it for years to heat their homes and power their factories, was a trump card that <a href="#">Putin</a> could play if the war he started last February dragged into a long winter.</p> <p>Citizens from countries who were not directly at war with Russia might wonder, as the cold started to bite, why their comfort and livelihoods were being sacrificed on behalf of Ukraine. National leaders, feeling domestic pressure, might agitate for sanctions to be softened or for peace to be brokered on terms favorable to Moscow, it was thought.</p> <p>“There’s a traditional view in Russia that one of its best assets in warfare is general winter,” explains Keir Giles, a senior consulting fellow at think tank Chatham House.</p> <p>“In this case, Russia sought to exploit winter to augment the power of another tool in its box: the energy weapon. Russia was counting on a winter freeze to bring Europe to its senses and convince publics across the continent that support for Ukraine was not worth the pain in their wallets,” Giles adds.</p> <p>But that long chill has yet to pass. Western and Central Europe have enjoyed a milder winter than expected, which, along with a coordinated drive to reduce gas consumption, has taken one of Putin’s largest bargaining chips out of his hands.</p> <p>As we head further into 2023, European governments now have a window of opportunity to get their ducks in a row and reduce reliance on Russian gas before another winter comes around. Doing so could play a crucial role in maintaining the West’s united front as the war drags on.</p> <p>So, how long is this window and what short-term measures can be taken to make the most of it?</p> <p>Adam Bell, a former UK government energy official, says that the warm winter has effectively “bought Europe a year. A colder December and January would have eaten through a lot of Europe’s gas stockpiles, which could have led to a physical shortage of molecules.”</p> <p>He warns, however, that simply stockpiling gas isn’t enough. “More work needs to be done in efficiency. Homes and businesses need buildings that waste less energy through insulation. Companies need to switch manufacturing processes away from natural gas.”</p> <p>Critics accuse European governments of focusing too much on controlling the immediate price of gas, rather than investing in longer-term measures like efficiency and renewables.</p> <p>“There is an understandable political instinct to alleviate the price because it directly addresses the cost concerns of households and businesses. But making gas cheaper removes the incentive to reduce overall consumption,” says Milan Elkerbout, a research fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies.</p>

“Politicians tend to think of energy efficiency as a long-term project. Partly this is because of shortages in materials such as insulation and a shortage of skilled workers. But even small efficiency measures taken in the short term can contribute to a big overall change in consumption,” Elkerbout adds.

In the medium term, Europe now has an opportunity to implement some of the changes to its energy consumption habits that have proven politically difficult. Objection to renewable sources such as onshore wind farms and criticisms of the price of net-zero policies have been cast in a new light, now that the real costs and instability that come with imported gas are more obvious.

“Governments could do more to incentivize and speed up the development of renewable sources of energy,” says John Springford, deputy director at the Centre for European Reform. “A big step would be giving the green light to onshore wind. It would also be wise for governments to build storage capacity for liquid natural gas (LNG), which can happen fairly quickly and directly reduces the need for Russian gas.”

Whether or not European countries will take advantage of this brief chance to bolster their energy security is another matter entirely.

“Europe’s vulnerability that was suddenly exposed existed because of a longstanding complacency by Western powers,” says Giles.

“Western Europe had not been willing to listen to the frontline states who warned over the Russian regime’s intent and understood that more expensive energy was a price worth paying in exchange for not being vulnerable to Russian pressure. This complacency left Russia with multiple open goals to kick at in major Western European capitals, most notably Germany,” he adds.

As absurd as it sounds while bombs continue to fall on Ukraine, a return to the old complacency and a failure to shore up Europe’s energy independence is not out of the question.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) said in December that global demand for coal – the most polluting of all fossil fuels – reached a record high in 2022 amid the energy crisis caused by Russia’s war. Just a year after after countries agreed to phase down their use of coal at the United Nations’ climate conference in Glasgow, Europe found itself switching some of its recently closed coal power plants back on.

The IEA said that while the increase in coal consumption was relatively modest in most European countries, Germany saw a reversal of a “significant scale.”

European nations have historically been reluctant to merge their energy policy and markets. The reasons for this range from naked self-interest (why should one country benefit from another’s stockpiling?) to controlling markets (for example, why should cheaper LNG from Spain undercut French nuclear power?)

And even if the political appetite did emerge for some kind of common energy policy and market, it would be extremely difficult to manage centrally as individual nations would inevitably compete for resources and financial subsidies.

That is what makes this current window so important. While the active fighting continues, it is vital it serves as a reminder that failure to act now could mean sleepwalking into a disaster next winter. And a self-inflicted energy crisis would return the power to Putin that was denied to him through sheer luck, and some unseasonably warm weather.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Authorities: no survivors Nepal plane crash</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/16/nepal-plane-crash-no-survivors-yeti/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/16/nepal-plane-crash-no-survivors-yeti/</a>
GIST	KATHMANDU, Nepal — There are “no survivors” from the Yeti Airlines plane crash near Nepal’s new Pokhara Airport, authorities said Monday.

	<p>Tek Bahadur K.C., chief district officer of the Kaski District, said that at least 69 of the 72 people on the plane had died, with rescuers searching for the bodies of the last people who remain unaccounted for.</p> <p>“Three bodies are now left inside the deep gorge,” K.C. said. “It’s very difficult to go inside the gorge, which is 300 meters deep and very narrow.”</p> <p>Prem Nath Thakur, spokesperson for Kathmandu’s Tribhuvan International Airport and a member of the rescue coordination committee, said authorities had recovered both black boxes, the cockpit voice recorder and flight data recorder, from the crash site. They will be handed over to the investigation committee members, who reached the crash site on Monday, Thakur said.</p> <p>The flight departed from the capital, Kathmandu, around 10:30 a.m. local time Sunday bound for Pokhara, a city about 125 miles west of Kathmandu that is popular with tourists.</p> <p>The flight was expected to be about 25 minutes, and authorities were alerted of the crash about 11 a.m., Assistant Sub Inspector Rudra Thapa of the Pokhara police said Sunday.</p> <p>The cause of the crash was not clear Monday, which was declared a national day of mourning.</p> <p>Video footage showed the aircraft, an <a href="#">ATR 72-500</a> twin-engine turboprop propeller plane, flying low and tilting to its side seconds before it went down. Other videos posted online showed the plane on fire, with large plumes of smoke emerging from the crash site as dozens of people crowded around it.</p> <p>Bodies of Nepali victims who have been identified will be returned to families after postmortem examinations are completed, K.C. said. Bodies of foreigners that have been identified will be airlifted to Kathmandu on Monday, he added.</p> <p><a href="#">According to an airline statement</a>, at least 53 Nepali nationals and 15 foreign nationals were on the flight, including five from India, four from Russia, two from South Korea, one from Argentina, one from Australia, one from France and one from Ireland.</p> <p>Nearly 350 people have died in plane or helicopter crashes in Nepal since 2000, <a href="#">Reuters reported</a>, and the European Union has <a href="#">banned all Nepal-based airlines</a> from its airspace since 2013, citing safety concerns.</p> <p>In May, 22 people <a href="#">were killed</a> in a crash on a flight involving another twin-propeller plane operated by Tara Air, a subsidiary of Yeti Airlines. The plane departed from Pokhara’s old airport and was headed for Jomson, a tourist town about 20 minutes away.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 US expands Ukraine large-scale training</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/15/us-military-ukraine-training-germany-grafenwoehr/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/15/us-military-ukraine-training-germany-grafenwoehr/</a>
GIST	<p>ABOARD A U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT OVER EUROPE — The U.S. military has launched an expanded, more sophisticated training program of Ukrainian forces that is focused on large-scale combat and meant to bolster Ukraine’s ability to take back territory from Russian forces, the Pentagon’s top general said Sunday.</p> <p>Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on a flight from Washington to Europe that the training began Sunday at the Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany and will continue for five or six weeks. About 500 soldiers will go through the initial version of training, focused on what the military calls combined-arms warfare, in which tanks, artillery, combat vehicles and other weapons are layered to maximize the violence they inflict.</p> <p>“We want the Ukrainians to have a capability to successfully defend their country,” Milley said. “Ukraine is doing nothing more than defending itself, and they are trying to liberate Russian-occupied Ukraine.”</p>



The training, [first disclosed in planning late last year](#), begins as the United States and its allies lock in an ever-growing list of weapons that could be used in an expected Ukrainian counteroffensive within months. The Biden administration approved the transfer of \$3 billion in weapons on [Jan. 6](#), marking the single largest transfer of arms to Ukraine since Russia invaded nearly a year ago, as the administration seeks cooperation from other allies to provide similar arms. Among the weapons in the U.S. package are 50 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles and motorized howitzer artillery.

Other nations, including Britain, Poland and France, have pledged complementary weapons, including battle tanks, and Ukraine has pressured Germany to do the same. Milley said the challenge will be determining how quickly the Ukrainian military will be ready and trained to use all of the new military equipment. The situation will be eased because some of the Ukrainian forces already are familiar with other armored weapons, such as the T-72 tank.

“It’ll take a bit of time,” Milley said. “Five, six, seven, eight weeks, who knows. We’ll see what happens here. But in terms of the criticality of it, the need is now.”

The general plans to spend the week in Europe, meeting with European counterparts, viewing the training, observing logistics hubs through which weapons flow, and participating in a planning conference that will include NATO allies and Ukrainian military officials. On Friday, he and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will participate in a gathering of the Ukraine Contact Group, in which countries supporting the government in Kyiv come together, assess what Ukraine needs and make commitments about what they can provide.

Milley said that Ukraine’s first priority is finding more air defenses, a continuing challenge highlighted by a Russian missile attack on a civilian apartment complex in the city of Dnipro on Saturday that killed dozens of people.

“They’re getting hit every few weeks with really significant attacks, and they’re attacks on the civilian infrastructure,” the general said. “The Russians are consciously, as a matter of policy, attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure. That in of itself is a war crime.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Russian draftees died in Ukraine strike</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/dozens-of-russian-draftees-died-in-a-ukrainian-strike-putins-war-machine-rolled-on-11673864038?mod=hp_lead_pos7">https://www.wsj.com/articles/dozens-of-russian-draftees-died-in-a-ukrainian-strike-putins-war-machine-rolled-on-11673864038?mod=hp_lead_pos7</a>
GIST	<p>Two weeks after a missile strike <a href="#">killed dozens of freshly mobilized Russians</a> at a makeshift barracks in eastern Ukraine, many back home in Russia are still seeking an answer to the question: Are their relatives alive or dead?</p> <p>One 36-year-old woman, searching for her cousin, who served in one of the regiments housed at the barracks, said the recruiting office told her he was doing his duty. “Wait for news,” she said she was told. Now she is calling hospitals asking whether her relative turned up there.</p> <p>Yet <a href="#">the New Year’s Day strike in the Russian-occupied city of Makiivka</a> that killed at least <a href="#">89 Russian draftees</a>, according to the Russian Defense Ministry, provoked little more than murmurs of discontent in the region of Samara in southwestern Russia, where many of the dead were from. Few in Samara are openly resisting the Kremlin’s pursuit of the war, which rumbles on after nearly a year and has so far cost thousands of Russian lives.</p> <p>The woman, a Samara native, said she opposed the war and had never voted for Russian President <a href="#">Vladimir Putin</a>. But asked how she felt about her cousin’s mobilization, she said: “I didn’t have a reaction. He was called up, so he had to go.”</p>

“Our great-grandfather and great-grandmother went through World War II,” said the woman. “There were no cowards in the family.”

The resignation of those affected by the attack highlights an advantage for the Kremlin as it digs in for a long war: Mr. Putin faces little domestic pressure over its costs, even as the body count rises. His [decision to mobilize 300,000 men](#) appears to have shored up Russian lines, which were wobbling late last year after a series of defeats, and allowed them to advance for the first time since July, claiming the town of Soledar in eastern Ukraine.

The question now is whether the strategy of flooding Ukraine with poorly trained draftees with low morale and old equipment will grind down Ukrainian resistance.

Or whether the morale of Ukrainian forces, with their highly motivated soldiers armed with increasingly powerful Western weapons, can outlast them in a protracted conflict.

It was one minute past midnight on Jan. 1 when four Ukrainian precision rockets slammed into a vocational school in the mining town of Makiivka that Russia’s military had converted into a barracks for newly mobilized troops.

Hours later, draftees from nearby barracks were driven there and handed gloves. Sifting through the rubble for bodies, a 27-year-old who was an electrician before being drafted said he lost track of time as dozens of corpses piled up. Russian war bloggers later said there were at least 200 fatalities in the strike.

“I didn’t think about anything other than how we ended up in this mess,” the draftee recalled of the cleanup job.

Days later he was sent to the trenches, where he hunkered down, gripping his Soviet-era rifle while under artillery fire with no clear tasks, he said.

“We have no morale, just fear and constant stress,” the draftee recalled. “This isn’t our war. We’re just trying to survive.”

The soldier, who first spoke to independent Russian media outlet Verstka and whose draft summons was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, said he is now only thinking about how to escape or survive the fighting and get home to his family.

“Many of the guys don’t want to be here at all,” the soldier said.

Anastasia Andreychenko, a 36-year-old business administrator in Samara, has been ferrying supplies to Russian forces in eastern Ukraine on and off since Moscow’s covert invasion there in 2014. Within days of the Makiivka strike, she and fellow volunteers had crowdfunded gear for the surviving soldiers—winter uniforms and boots, thermal underwear and generators, night-vision goggles and drones—and delivered it to the Ukrainian city some 850 miles to the west.

The attack had struck fear in Samarans, she said, but she still supports the invasion. Ms. Andreychenko said it is the duty of people like her to show that Russian society supports both the soldiers on the battlefield and their relatives back home.

“The most important thing right now is to preserve the rear,” Ms. Andreychenko said. “We can’t allow society to lose faith and spirit. We have to preserve everyone’s morale as much as we can.”

Some soldiers involved in the strike and many of their families back home in Samara are irked that the Russian Defense Ministry placed the blame for the strike not on the army commanders but on the mobilized troops themselves. The ministry said that Kyiv was able to pinpoint the location of the barracks because the troops were using their cellphones. War bloggers and families say the location, just 10 miles

from the front lines, was conspicuous and doubled as an ammunition storage site, making it an obvious target.

Igor Girkin, a former Russian intelligence officer who commanded irregular Russian forces in eastern Ukraine in 2014, said on Telegram after the attack that Russian generals were “untrainable.” Vladlen Tatarsky, a military blogger whom Mr. Putin invited to the Kremlin in September for a ceremony annexing four Ukrainian regions, called for a tribunal for the Russian military leadership in response to the Makiivka strike, describing Russia’s top officers as “untrained cretins.”

The Russian Defense Ministry didn’t comment on the criticism.

Samara regional governor, Dmitry Azarov, confirmed there were dead and wounded soldiers from his region a day after the strike, and urged relatives to reach out to their local recruitment offices for more information. But as the days passed, obituaries trickled out slowly and loved ones began to raise an angry storm in local social-media groups.

In response, Samara’s regional military commissar, Alexei Volodin, on Jan. 10 said lists of the dead and wounded soldiers wouldn’t be published because that would allow “foreign intelligence agencies to identify and carry out provocative measures against relatives of military personnel.” An online petition calling on the authorities to publish the names has since garnered more than 50,000 votes.

The domestic criticism when it has come after military disasters during the war, however, hasn’t only been muted but directed at the army leadership instead of at Mr. Putin.

While Russia’s urban centers saw [protests early in the war](#), a violent crackdown by the Kremlin has resulted in dozens jailed and hundreds arrested for speaking out against the invasion. The authorities also closed dozens of independent media outlets and [blocked Western social-media platforms such as Facebook](#) and Twitter, leaving state media as the primary source of information for most Russians, where the full horrors of the war aren’t recounted.

“Propaganda plays down the costs of the war,” said Lev Gudkov, director of the Moscow-based independent Levada Center pollster. “At an everyday level, the war, at the moment, isn’t provoking strong anxiety and objections.”

Moreover, internal Kremlin polling on the war suggests that Russians will tolerate another round of mobilization, said a former Kremlin official.

The polling, conducted by the Public Opinion Fund, a state-run pollster, and reviewed by the Journal, shows that support for continuing what Mr. Putin refers to as a special military operation had dropped to 34% the week after he announced a draft in September—which prompted tens of thousands of men to flee the country—before soaring back up to 80% by mid-November once the mobilization was declared over.

Among those killed in the New Year’s Day strike was Andrei Yumadilov, a 47-year-old father of two from Samara and a churchgoer who was against the war, said a friend of his.

Mr. Yumadilov, who worked as a welder at oil-and-gas fields, received his draft summons at his home in the fall. Instead of fleeing the country, he complied with his orders.

“They came to his home and handed him the summons, which he accepted dutifully,” said the friend. “He was one of the most honest people I knew. And maybe even naive, because he didn’t even consider trying to evade service.”

The two friends last spoke two weeks before the strike, the friend recalled, saying that Mr. Yumadilov painted a grim picture of life on the front lines and sounded dejected by his situation.

	<p>“A lot of people don’t understand why we need this, why all these men are being sent to die,” the friend said. “Because in reality, no one attacked us, no matter what they try to tell us.”</p> <p>Still, he expressed resignation: “What’s happened has happened.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Day 327 of the Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/16/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-327-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/16/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-327-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Russia and Belarus have begun joint air force drills this morning, triggering fears in Kyiv and the west that Moscow could use its ally to launch a new ground offensive in Ukraine.</b> According to a <a href="#">statement</a> published to the Telegram account of the Belarus ministry of defence, units from Russia’s aerospace forces arrived at the airfields of Belarus late on Sunday night. Shortly after 8am local time the ministry said the planned combat training tasks had begun.</li> <li>• <b>Viacheslav Chaus</b>, the <b>Chernihiv</b> governor, has warned residents that there is likely to be an increase in air raid warnings as a result of the exercises. Belarus has described the drills as purely defensive. The country was used as a base for Russian troops to launch their failed assault on Kyiv in February 2022,</li> <li>• Russia launched an attack on Ukraine’s south-eastern city of <b>Zaporizhzhia</b> overnight, wounding civilians and destroying residential infrastructure, according to regional officials. <b>Kyrylo Tymoshenko</b>, deputy head of the office of president of Ukraine said “The occupiers launched a rocket attack on the regional centre. The rocket hit next to a five-story building. Five people, including two children aged nine and 15, were injured by glass fragments. The children were hospitalised.”</li> <li>• Air defences in <b>Sevastopol</b> in <b>Crimea</b> have been active against Ukrainian drones, according to the Russian-imposed regional governor in the area which Russia annexed in 2014.</li> <li>• As of Sunday, Ukraine’s forces have “almost certainly” maintained positions in <b>Soledar</b>, north of Bakhmut, according to the UK ministry of defence. Over the weekend, intense fighting continued in both the Kremina and Bakhmut sectors of the Donbas front, the ministry added.</li> <li>• <b>The number of people killed in a Russian <a href="#">missile attack on a residential block in Dnipro</a> has risen to 37</b>, the state broadcaster Suspilne reported Ukrainian officials had confirmed to it. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in a Sunday latest <a href="#">address</a> that the victims included a 15-year-old girl. At least 73 people were wounded and 39 people had been rescued as of Sunday afternoon. The city government in Dnipro said 43 people were still reported missing. “The chances of saving people now are minimal,” Dnipro’s mayor, Borys Filatov, told Reuters. I think the number of dead will be in the dozens.”</li> <li>• Claiming responsibility for the missile strikes across Ukraine, <b>Russia’s defence ministry said on Sunday that it achieved its goal.</b> A ministry statement posted on Telegram said: “All designated targets have been hit. The goal of the attack has been achieved.” However, it did not mention the attack on the Dnipro residential building.</li> <li>• <b>President Vladimir Putin has told Russian state television that what he calls the “special military operation” in Ukraine has gained positive momentum.</b> “The dynamic is positive,” he told Rossiya 1 state television. “Everything is developing within the framework of the plan of the ministry of defence and the general staff.” Putin said he hoped soldiers would deliver more wins after Russia claimed control of the eastern Ukrainian salt-mining town of Soledar – a claim disputed by Kyiv.</li> <li>• <b>Battle tanks from German industrial reserves wanted by Ukraine will <a href="#">not be ready to be delivered until 2024</a>.</b> The warning from arms manufacturer Rheinmetall will dampen Kyiv’s hopes that the UK’s promise to deliver Challenger 2 tanks would encourage other European nations to swiftly follow suit. “Even if the decision to send our Leopard tanks to Kyiv came tomorrow, the delivery would take until the start of next year,” Rheinmetall’s chief executive, Armin Papperger, told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper.</li> <li>• German defence minister <b>Christine Lambrecht</b> on Monday asked Chancellor <b>Olaf Scholz</b> for her dismissal. Her decision to step down comes as Germany is under pressure to approve an increase in international military support for Kyiv, and Germany’s defence capabilities have been called</li> </ul>

	<p>into question after several Puma infantry tanks were put out of service during a recent military drill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Ukrainian vessel carrying peas was grounded in Istanbul's <b>Bosphorus strait</b> on Monday, and traffic in the strait was suspended. No damage was reported. The joint coordination centre in Istanbul, which runs the UN-brokered Black Sea grain deal operations, said at the weekend the ship was travelling from Pivdennyi – a commercial seaport in the Ukrainian city of Yuzhne, near Odesa – to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Mersin.</li> <li>• <b>The UK prime minister has confirmed the country will provide <a href="#">14 of its Challenger 2 main battle tanks</a> and other advanced artillery support to Ukraine in the coming weeks.</b> Downing Street said Rishi Sunak made the pledge during a call on Saturday morning with Volodymyr Zelenskyy as a sign of the UK's "ambition to intensify our support to Ukraine". Russia's embassy in Britain said the move would only "intensify" the conflict.</li> <li>• <b>The UK foreign secretary has said "now is the time to accelerate and go further and faster" in giving Ukraine the support it needs.</b> In a <a href="#">column for British tabloid the Sun on Sunday</a>, James Cleverly writes that the Russian army is on the defensive and morale among its troops is pitiful, blaming the "shambolic state of Russian military logistics".</li> <li>• <b>Nato's secretary general said Ukraine could expect more deliveries of heavy weapons from western countries soon.</b> "The recent pledges for heavy warfare equipment are important – and I expect more in the near future," Jens Stoltenberg told Germany's Handelsblatt daily on Sunday. Western allies will consider sending battle tanks to Kyiv ahead of a meeting in Ramstein in Germany next Friday where governments are expected to announce their latest pledges of military support.</li> <li>• <b>The US military has launched an expanded, more sophisticated training programme of Ukrainian forces</b> that is focused on large-scale combat and designed to bolster Ukraine's ability to take back territory from Russian forces, the Pentagon's top general said on Sunday.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Experts warn Covid surge remains big risk</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/15/covid-19-coronavirus-us-surge-complacency">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/15/covid-19-coronavirus-us-surge-complacency</a>
GIST	<p>In the fourth year of the pandemic, Covid-19 is once again spreading across America and being driven by the recent holidays, fewer precautions and the continuing evolution of Omicron subvariants of the virus.</p> <p>New sub-variants are causing concern for their increased transmissibility and ability to <a href="#">evade some antibodies</a>, but the same tools continue to curtail the spread of Covid, especially bivalent boosters, masks, ventilation, antivirals and other precautions, experts said.</p> <p>Yet booster uptake has been "pitiful", said Neil Sehgal, an assistant professor of health policy and management at the University of Maryland School of Public Health. Antiviral uptake has been <a href="#">low</a>, and few mandates on masking, vaccination and testing have resumed in the face of the winter surge, which is once again putting pressure on health systems.</p> <p>New Covid hospital admissions are now at the fourth-highest rate of the pandemic, <a href="#">according</a> to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Covid hospitalizations declined somewhat after the summer wave, but never dropped to the low levels seen after previous spikes, persisting through the fall and rising again with the winter holidays.</p> <p>"Hospitals are at maximum capacity," said Brendan Williams, president and CEO of the New Hampshire Health Care Association, of his region's current rates. "I'm not sure what the trajectory of this thing's going to be, but I am worried."</p> <p>The majority of Covid hospitalizations are among those 65 and older, although the share for children under four <a href="#">roughly doubled</a> in 2022.</p> <p>In the past week, Covid deaths <a href="#">rose</a> by 44%, from 2,705 in the week ending 4 January to 3,907 in the week ending 11 January.</p>



This is one of the greatest surges of Covid cases in the entire pandemic, according to [wastewater analyses](#) of the virus. It's much lower than the peak in January 2022, but similar to the summer 2022 surge, which was the second biggest.

And it's not done yet. "Certainly it does not appear that we are peaking yet," Sehgal said.

The Omicron subvariants BQ.1.1 and BQ.1 as well as the quickly expanding XBB.1.5 make up the majority of cases, according to CDC [estimates](#). The north-east, where more than 80% of cases are estimated to be from the XBB.1.5 subvariant, has the highest proportion of cases, according to wastewater data.

"With XBB, there's such a significant transmission advantage that exposure is really risky – it's riskier now than it's ever been" in terms of transmissibility, Sehgal said.

Official case counts have been [slower to rise](#), because of the prevalence of at-home tests and because of a general reluctance to test at all, experts say. Of the tests that are reported, however, positivity rates have been very high, with about one in six tests ([16%](#)) turning positive.

Despite the high rates of Covid spread, hospitalizations have not yet reached previous peaks seen earlier in the pandemic, probably due to immunity from vaccinations and prior cases, said Stuart Ray, a professor of medicine and infectious diseases at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

But that protection should not be taken for granted, he said, particularly because immunity wanes.

"Boosters really do make a difference," he said. "The severe cases we are seeing are probably at least somewhat avoidable, if folks make sure that they stay updated on vaccination, because that's still the safest way to gain immunity."

Boosters, especially the updated bivalent boosters, are highly effective at reducing the risk of severe disease and death. Yet only 15.4% of Americans over the age of five have received the new boosters.

"You're just fighting a lot of misinformation and also some political missteps when it comes to the vaccines," Williams said. When Joe Biden declared the pandemic was "over" in September, he said, it probably stalled public enthusiasm for the new booster and spurred further inaction from Congress on more funding to address the pandemic.

"It's challenging to strike that parallel narrative that you shouldn't worry about Covid but also go get a shot," said Sehgal, calling the declaration "another unforced error".

While vaccines are very important, other precautions also help prevent infection, disease, and death, Sehgal said – particularly important during a surge like this. Yet because of poor messaging from officials, many people may not even realize the US is experiencing a surge and precautions are still necessary, he added.

"I think the majority of people who aren't masking today, just don't know that they should."

Even if the US reaches the point where surges do not cause a corresponding increase in hospitalizations and death, they will still increase the number of people sickened and disabled by long Covid, experts said.

"There's accumulating data that repeated Covid accumulates risk for short- and long-term complications, including cardiovascular, mental health and other problems," Ray said. "We will only know in retrospect exactly how big this cost is. But evolving data suggests that there is a cost that's incremental as we accumulate infections."



	<p>Williams is worried that hospitals are reaching maximum capacity even as long-term care facilities see outbreaks among residents and staff, after years of worker shortages.</p> <p>“In New Hampshire, nursing homes will not admit those that they feel that they cannot staff to care for, which I think is admirable, but the consequence of that is that the hospitals are jammed up,” he said. Hospitals that might release patients to care facilities for transitional or long-term care will see beds filled for longer, putting even more pressure on the hospitals, patients and health workers.</p> <p>“It’s a continuum, but right now the continuum is broken,” Williams said.</p> <p>Health workers have experienced three years of burnout, disability and death, and some have needed to exit the workforce. Others have been alarmed by unsafe working conditions and the continued crises caused by the pandemic. Nurses in New York reached a tentative agreement this week after striking for safer working conditions.</p> <p>Nursing homes and residential care facilities have roughly 300,000 fewer workers today than there were in March 2020, Williams said. “It’s hard to see how it’s going to get better,” he said.</p> <p>In the meantime, Covid continues circulating, with nursing home residents and staff seeing one of the biggest rises in cases of the pandemic.</p> <p>“The first key to keeping people healthy in a nursing home is to keep people in the community healthy,” Williams said. But “it just doesn’t seem like people are wearing masks and getting boosted – people aren’t taking any of this seriously. We just seemed to declare that when it comes to Covid mortality, we’re number one, and that’s a title that we’re not going to relinquish to any other country.”</p> <p>Sehgal calls it a “collective forgetting” about how and why we need to protect ourselves and one another. “There are people for whom a mild infection actually isn’t so mild, either because of their underlying health, or because of social factors in their life,” he said. “It’s just a tremendous self-inflicted wound.”</p> <p>And the more the virus spreads, the more opportunities it has to evolve, potentially picking up mutations that make it easier to overcome immunity.</p> <p>Yet the same measures that helped curb previous surges still work today. And they don’t just prevent illness and death – they also minimize social disruption, like lost hours at work and school. “Those steps that we can take to protect ourselves and protect other people – they don’t seem onerous in the face of a Covid infection,” Sehgal said.</p> <p>As Ray put it: “When we could be wearing a mask, why aren’t we?”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Embattled German defense minister resigns</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/world/europe/german-defense-minister-resigns-after-weeks-of-criticism.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/world/europe/german-defense-minister-resigns-after-weeks-of-criticism.html</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN — Germany’s defense minister, Christine Lambrecht, has resigned after enduring a year of heavy criticism over repeated public blunders, her response to the Ukraine war and her government’s slow rollout of a military buildup.</p> <p>Ms. Lambrecht is the highest-ranking member of Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s government to resign, and her departure is likely to be seen as a blow to his reputation. The chancellor had repeatedly defended the record of Ms. Lambrecht, a former justice minister and a fellow member of his party, the Social Democrats.</p>

“The monthslong media focus on me as a person hardly allows for objective reporting and discussion about the servicemen and women, the German armed forces and security policy decisions in the interest of the citizens of Germany,” Ms. Lambrecht said in a statement released on Monday morning.

Since taking up the post when Mr. Scholz’s government entered office last year, Ms. Lambrecht had been dogged by criticism. She had no previous experience of the military and opposition leaders accused her of lacking interest in heading the Defense Ministry. According to Germany’s best-selling daily, Bild, Ms. Lambrecht had been unable to name the different ranks of the German military in an interview with the paper.

Ms. Lambrecht began facing public scorn at the start of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. As Germany debated sending weapons to Kyiv in the early days of the invasion, Ms. Lambrecht trumpeted a delivery of 5,000 helmets. She was the face of the government’s repeated foot-dragging over sending weapons, though it is likely she was carrying out a policy largely driven by the chancellery.

Criticism ramped up last summer when it emerged that Ms. Lambrecht had used a government helicopter to take her son on a family vacation.

More recently, opposition parties in Germany have argued Ms. Lambrecht is responsible for the slow rollout of a 100 billion euro (\$108 billion) defense fund, part of a plan by the government to significantly bolster its military in response to the war in Ukraine. Germany’s limited stores of basic ammunition mean it has stocks for only hours or days of combat.

The final straw appears to have been an awkward video released on New Year’s Eve on Ms. Lambrecht’s personal Instagram account. In it, Ms. Lambrecht discussed the war in Ukraine and offered seasonal greetings amid a raucous backdrop of fireworks in Berlin. Critics called it distasteful, and even her own ministry distanced itself from the video, saying it was a personal statement.

In her statement, Ms. Lambrecht said that she hoped her resignation would put the public focus back where it belonged. “The valuable work of the soldiers and the many motivated people in the area of operations must be in the foreground,” she said.

A successor has not been announced.

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HEADLINE	01/16 Ukraine’s pursuit of West weapons pays off
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/16/world/russia-ukraine-news#britain-plans-to-encourage-allies-to-send-tanks-to-ukraine">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/16/world/russia-ukraine-news#britain-plans-to-encourage-allies-to-send-tanks-to-ukraine</a>
GIST	<p>A long-range rocket system, armored vehicles, a ground-based air defense system and now, tanks.</p> <p>Almost a year after Russia invaded Ukraine, Britain is sending a squadron of 14 Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, adding to an array of modern weapons that allies have provided for Kyiv.</p> <p>Only months ago such aid was considered taboo, for fear that it would prompt Russia to escalate the war. But as Ukraine has persisted with its demands for weapons and made advances on the battlefield, its allies have fulfilled more and more of its requests.</p> <p>“They have finally accepted that this going to be a long war unless they intervene with even more resources to speed up a Ukrainian victory,” said Mick Ryan, a military strategist and retired Australian army major general who is a fellow at the Lowy Institute, a research institute.</p> <p>NATO’s secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, said that after Britain’s commitment for heavy hardware, “I expect more in the near future,” according to an interview with the German newspaper Handelsblatt published on Sunday.</p>

Britain's prime minister, Rishi Sunak, is leading the push, urging the United States, Canada and Europe to accelerate support for Ukraine. It is a critical moment in the war, his office said, as Russia is on the back foot on the battlefield because of supply issues and plummeting morale.

"As the people of Ukraine approach their second year living under relentless Russian bombardment, the prime minister is dedicated to ensuring Ukraine wins this war," a Downing Street spokesperson said in a statement on Saturday. Mr. Sunak "is clear that a long and static war only serves Russia's ends."

Mr. Sunak said Ukraine's allies should deliver all the aid, both diplomatic and military, that they have planned to give Ukraine this year as soon as possible. Britain has said that in 2023 it plans to match or exceed the assistance that it provided Ukraine last year.

Kyiv has pleaded for Western tanks almost since the start of the war to supplement the Soviet-era and Russian-made tanks that were in Ukraine's stockpiles or supplied by other countries in Eastern Europe. Those tanks are wearing out fast after months of battle.

Britain's announcement was expected to ratchet up pressure on Germany to commit to sending its coveted Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, or to at least allow other European countries that have those German-made tanks to give them to Ukraine. The Polish government said this week that it wanted to give Ukraine some of its German-made tanks, although Berlin would need to allow it.

This week, Britain's foreign secretary, James Cleverly, will visit the United States and Canada to discuss how the three nations can coordinate even more closely on sanctions against Russia and military aid for Kyiv. The defense secretary, Ben Wallace, will head to Estonia and Germany to meet with NATO members and other allies.

British officials and commentators have largely welcomed Mr. Sunak's decision.

"This is very late in the day," Tobias Ellwood, chair of Britain's Defense Select Committee told the BBC. "But we are becoming bolder, less risk reverse — less spooked by Putin's rhetoric that any serious Western involvement could have repercussions."

Mr. Sunak's office said the tanks would go into the country in the coming weeks, adding that more shipments of guns and ammunition are expected to follow.

Britain will begin training Ukrainian forces to use the tanks and guns in the coming days, the prime minister's office said, as part of wider efforts that have seen thousands of Ukrainian troops trained in Britain over the last six months. Mr. Wallace, the defense secretary, is scheduled to provide further details of Britain's support for Ukraine in the House of Commons on Monday.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Arizona suburb's water is cut off</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/us/skipped-showers-paper-plates-an-arizona-suburbs-water-is-cut-off.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/us/skipped-showers-paper-plates-an-arizona-suburbs-water-is-cut-off.html</a>
GIST	<p>RIO VERDE, Ariz. — Joe McCue thought he had found a desert paradise when he bought one of the new stucco houses sprouting in the granite foothills of Rio Verde, Ariz. There were good schools, mountain views and cactus-spangled hiking trails out the back door.</p> <p>Then the water got cut off.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the community's longtime water supplier, the neighboring city of Scottsdale, turned off the tap for Rio Verde Foothills, blaming a grinding drought that is threatening the future of the West. Scottsdale said it had to focus on conserving water for its own residents, and could no longer sell water to roughly 500 to 700 homes — or around 1,000 people. That meant the unincorporated swath of \$500,000</p>

stucco houses, mansions and horse ranches outside Scottsdale's borders would have to fend for itself and buy water from other suppliers — if homeowners could find them, and afford to pay much higher prices.

Almost overnight, the Rio Verde Foothills turned into a worst-case scenario of a hotter, drier climate, showing what happens when unregulated growth collides with shrinking water supplies.

For residents who put their savings into newly built homes that promised desert sunsets, peace and quiet (but relegated the water situation to the fine print), the turmoil is also deeply personal. The water disruption has unraveled their routines and put their financial futures in doubt.

"Is it just a campground now?" Mr. McCue, 36, asked one recent morning, after he and his father installed gutters and rain barrels for a new drinking-water filtration system.

"We're really hoping we don't go dry by summer," he said. "Then we'll be in a really bad spot."

In a scramble to conserve, people are flushing their toilets with rainwater and lugging laundry to friends' homes. They are eating off paper plates, skipping showers and fretting about whether they have staked their fates on what could become a desiccated ghost suburb.

Some say they know how it might look to outsiders. Yes, they bought homes in the Sonoran desert. But they ask, are they such outliers? Arizona does not want for emerald-green fairways, irrigated lawns or water parks.

"I'm surrounded by plush golf courses, one of the largest fountains in the world," said Tony Johnson, 45, referring to the 500-foot water feature in the neighboring town of Fountain Hills.

Mr. Johnson's family built a house in Rio Verde two years ago, and landscaped the yard with rocks, not thirsty greenery. "We're not putting in a pool, we're not putting in grass," he said. "We're not trying to bring the Midwest here."

The heavy rain and snow battering California and other parts of the Mountain West over the past two weeks is helping to refill some reservoirs and soak dried-out soil. But water experts say that one streak of wet weather will not undo a 20-year drought that has practically emptied Lake Mead, the country's largest reservoir, and has strained the overburdened Colorado River, which supplies about 35 percent of Arizona's water. The rest comes from the state's own rivers or from aquifers in the ground.

Last week, Arizona learned that its water shortages could be even worse than many residents realized. As one of her first actions after taking office, Gov. Katie Hobbs unsealed a report showing that the fast-growing West Valley of Phoenix does not have enough groundwater to support tens of thousands of homes planned for the area; their development is now in question.

Water experts say Rio Verde Foothills' situation is unusually dire, but it offers a glimpse of the bitter fights and hard choices facing 40 million people across the West who rely on the Colorado River for the means to take showers, irrigate crops, or run data centers and fracking rigs.

"It's a cautionary tale for home buyers," said Sarah Porter, director of the Kyl Center for Water Policy at Arizona State University. "We can't just protect every single person who buys a parcel and builds a home. There isn't enough money or water."

Ms. Porter said a number of other unincorporated areas in Arizona rely on water service from larger nearby cities like Prescott or Flagstaff. They could find themselves in Rio Verde's straits if the drought persists and the cities start taking drastic conservation measures.

There are no sewers or water mains serving the Rio Verde Foothills, so for decades, homes there that did not have their own wells got water delivered by tanker trucks. (The homes that do have wells are not directly affected by the cutoff.)

The trucks would fill up with Scottsdale water at a pipe 15 minutes' drive from the Rio Verde Foothills, and then deliver water directly to people's front doors. Or rather, to 5,000-gallon storage tanks buried in their yards — enough water to last an average family about a month. When the tanks ran low, homeowners would call or send an electronic signal to the water haulers for another delivery.

It was a tenuous arrangement in the middle of the desert, but homeowners said the water always arrived, and had come to feel almost as reliable as a utility hookup.

Now, though, the water trucks can't refill close by in Scottsdale, and are having to crisscross the Phoenix metro area in search of supplies, filling up in cities a two-hour round trip from Rio Verde. That has meant more driving, more waiting and more money. An average family's water bill has jumped to \$660 a month from \$220, and it is unclear how long the water trucks will be able to keep drawing tens of thousands of gallons from those backup sources.

Heavier water users like Cody Reim, who moved into a starter house in Rio Verde two years ago, are being hit even harder. He said his water bills could now exceed \$1,000 a month — more than his mortgage payment. Mr. Reim and his wife have four young children, which in normal times meant a lot of dishwashing, countless toilet flushes and dozens of laundry cycles to clean soiled cloth diapers.

Mr. Reim, who works for his family's sheet-metal business, is planning to become his own water hauler, lashing large containers to his pickup and setting out to fill them up. He guesses that fetching water will take him 10 hours every week, but he said he would do anything to stay in Rio Verde. He loves the dark skies and the baying coyotes at night, and how his children can run up and down a dirt road that with views of the Four Peaks Wilderness.

"Even if this place went negative and I'd have to pay somebody to take it, I'd still be here," he said of his house. "There's no other option."

Cities across the Southwest have spent years trying to cut down on water consumption, recharge aquifers and find new ways to reuse water to cope with the drought.

Experts say that most Arizona residents do not have to worry about losing their drinking water any time soon, though deeper cuts loom for agricultural users, who use about 70 percent of Arizona's water supply. Phoenix and surrounding cities have imposed few water restrictions on residents.

Rio Verde Foothills once felt like a remote community far from the urban centers of Scottsdale or Phoenix, residents said, a quilt of ranches and self-built houses scattered among mesquite and palo verde trees.

But over the past few years, there has been a frenzy of home construction in the area, fueled by cheap land prices and developers who took advantage of a loophole in Arizona's groundwater laws to construct homes without any fixed water supply.

To prevent unsustainable development in a desert state, Arizona passed a law in 1980 requiring subdivisions with six or more lots to show proof that they have a 100-year water supply.

But developers in Rio Verde Foothills have been sidestepping the rule by carving larger parcels into sections with four or five houses each, creating the impression of a miniature suburbia, but one that did not need to legally prove it had water.

"It's a slipped-through-the-cracks community," said Ms. Porter, with the Kyl Center for Water Policy.

Thomas Galvin, a county supervisor who represents the area, says there's not much the county can do if builders split their parcels into five lots or less to get around the water supply requirement. "Our hands are tied," he said.

People in Rio Verde Foothills are bitterly divided over how to resolve their water woes.

When some proposed forming their own self-funded water provider, other residents revolted, saying the idea would foist an expensive, freedom-stealing new arm of government on them. The idea collapsed. Other solutions, like allowing a larger water utility to serve the area, could be years off.

On Thursday, a group of residents sued Scottsdale in an effort to get the water turned back on. They argued the city violated an Arizona law that restricts cities from cutting off utility services to customers outside their borders. Scottsdale did not respond to the lawsuit.

Rose Carroll, 66, who is a plaintiff in the suit, said she would support any idea that would keep her from having to kill her donkeys.

She moved to Rio Verde Foothills two years ago, and runs a small ranch for two dozen rescued donkeys who had been abandoned, left in kill pens or doused with acid. The donkeys spend their days in a corral on her seven-acre property, eating hay and drinking a total of 300 gallons of water every day.

Ms. Carroll collected rainwater after a recent winter storm, enough for a few weeks' worth of toilet flushes. The new cost to get water delivered to the ranch could reach an unaffordable \$1,800 a month, she said, so she is putting some of the donkeys up for adoption and said she might have to euthanize others if she does not have enough water to keep them alive.

She said she got a call a few days ago, asking her to take in two more abandoned donkeys, but had to say no.

"I didn't have the water," she said.

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HEADLINE	01/16 China unrest: unpaid 'zero Covid' workers
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/world/asia/china-covid-protests.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/world/asia/china-covid-protests.html</a>
GIST	<p>After China's abrupt reversal of "zero Covid" restrictions, the nation's vast machinery of virus surveillance and testing collapsed, even as infections and deaths surged. Now, the authorities face another problem: Angry pandemic-control workers demanding wages and jobs.</p> <p>In the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing, hundreds of workers locked in a pay dispute with a Covid test kit manufacturer hurled objects at police officers in riot gear, who held up shields as they retreated. Standing on stocks of inventory, protesters kicked and tossed boxes of rapid antigen tests on to the ground, sending thousands of tests spilling.</p> <p>In the eastern city of Hangzhou, witnesses said several workers climbed on the roof of a test kit factory and threatened to jump to protest unpaid furloughs. And at a separate test manufacturing plant in the city, workers protested for days over a wage dispute.</p> <p>The unrest this month highlights a little-noticed aspect of the social and economic fallout from China's "zero Covid" policy U-turn. Mass testing was a <a href="#">cornerstone of China's strategy</a> of isolating the virus before it could spread. But Covid testing of any sort is no longer in high demand. Companies that manufactured test kits and analyzed results in a lab are seeing their revenues plummet, leading to layoffs and pay cuts for their workers. <a href="#">One report</a> suggested that mass testing in large cities accounted for about 1.3 percent of China's economic output.</p> <p>The consequence has been a new source of turmoil that challenges the ruling Communist Party's efforts to maintain stability amid high youth unemployment, a flagging economy and <a href="#">an explosion of Covid</a> across the country. China said on Saturday that it had recorded <a href="#">nearly 60,000 fatalities</a> linked to the coronavirus in the month since it lifted "zero Covid," though experts said the actual death toll was likely much higher.</p>



The New York Times visited three Covid test making factories in Hangzhou where workers and residents confirmed that there had been labor protests in recent days. At one plant operated by a firm called Xinyue Biotech, a fire truck, an ambulance and a police van could be seen in the factory yard on Wednesday responding to a worker who had climbed on to the fifth-floor roof and threatened to jump to protest unpaid wages. The shuttered plant had been the scene of days of demonstrations, witnesses near the factory said.

The Times also examined videos that have circulated on social media of protests in Hangzhou as well as Chongqing, where workers confronted the police in large numbers.

The disputes in Chongqing and Hangzhou could portend more unrest to come. Many among China's armies of "big whites," low-level government workers charged with enforcing Covid restrictions and named after their signature white hazmat suits, have been let go, muddying an already volatile labor market.

Factories across China are still strapped for cash amid the broader slowdown. Workers have next to no recourse to resolve their grievances other than to lash out, said Li Qiang, founder and executive director of China Labor Watch, a New York-based Chinese labor rights group.

"These protests have been very violent because the channels to defend workers' rights are very limited, while the trust toward the government and laws is low," Mr. Li said. "It demonstrates that if a company ignores workers rights, especially the most vulnerable temporary workers, it will face serious consequences."

In Chongqing, protesters at a test kit manufacturer chanted "Pay me back" as they faced off with lines of police on Jan. 7. It was not immediately clear what sparked the dispute between workers and the test kit manufacturer, Zybio. [Videos](#) posted on social media leading up to the protests warned of labor agencies in the area exploiting job seekers by inflating how much work Covid test manufacturers were offering and how much they would pay.

The Times verified the location of the Zybio protest videos by matching buildings in videos with online photos and satellite images of the industrial park. One clip showed protesters throwing plastic containers, stools and a traffic cone at police equipped with riot gear. The company did not respond to requests for comment, and several protesters contacted by The Times declined to be interviewed.

In Hangzhou, protests flared after workers at the Acon Biotech plant were told at the start of this month they would be furloughed for two weeks because the company's revenues had dwindled since "zero Covid" measures were dropped.

One employee who participated in the protests, who agreed to speak only if not quoted by name given the political sensitivity of labor unrest, said workers were enraged by the furlough because it meant they could not earn money before the Lunar New Year, which starts this weekend.

At one point, distraught employees threatened to jump off the roof of a company building. The workers were finally given 3,000 yuan, or roughly \$445, apiece a week ago, and the bulk of the work force then left for the holiday.

Many Chinese testing companies had been amassing fortunes during nearly three years of stringent Covid containment measures. But the emergence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant made containing the virus all but impossible, and China abandoned the strategy in early December.

Even without Omicron, China's strategy of mass testing was proving financially unsustainable. Many local governments — already under significant financial pressure from the slowdown and a dearth of land sales for real estate development — struggled to pay for the millions of free swabs that residents were ordered to take virtually every day.

To fund testing and other pandemic controls, money was diverted from public projects in some provinces, while cities cut bonuses for officials and imposed pay cuts on civil servants. Several provinces and municipalities, including Guizhou in China's southwest, began charging for the tests.

Lab testing firms that earlier reaped huge windfalls began reporting that governments were late on payments, leaving them exposed to bad debt. Among them was Dian Diagnostics, a large testing company in Hangzhou, which reported in October that the amount of money it was owed had surged by nearly 80 percent compared to a year before.

Shenzhen Hezi Gene Tech, another fast-growing testing firm, opened six new labs across China in October only to shutter half of them in the last few weeks. It was unclear if the closures were spurred by debt or a lack of business. The company did not respond to a request for comment.

"The whole industry has been hit particularly hard with the elimination of mandatory testing in the country. The demand is no longer there," said Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations, who argued that "zero Covid" had been partly prolonged because it served so many business interests.

"They made a lot of money working for the government implementing 'zero Covid,'" Mr. Huang said of labs and test manufacturers.

Just how disruptive the collapse of testing and all the employment associated with Covid controls will be to China's economy remains to be seen. The lifting of "zero Covid" will remove constraints on economic activity, and that could spur growth that would overshadow the loss of Covid-related businesses, said Taylor Loeb, a senior economic analyst for Trivium China, a consulting firm.

"A lot of these jobs were never going to be long-term, stable employment opportunities," Mr. Loeb said.

To many migrant workers, the timing could not be worse. Employees are usually eyeing bonuses and counting their savings in the weeks leading up to Lunar New Year so that they can travel home for the holiday, settle debts and lavish their family and friends with gifts.

In Hangzhou, a tense standoff between the police and hundreds of workers at an Alltest Biotech factory devolved into a shoving match Jan. 9, a video showed. Dozens of them were taken away by the police, several eyewitnesses said in interviews.

Workers hired by a temporary employment agency on Alltest's behalf had complained they were being paid less than permanent workers, according to an employee interviewed at the factory gate, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. An employee who answered a phone at Alltest said operations had returned to normal, but declined to provide a name or discuss the unrest.

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HEADLINE	01/15 Annual 'Tết Festival' Seattle draws 20,000
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/thousands-attend-tet-festival-seattle/281-f296197c-fbd0-476e-a823-e9f7bebb6885">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/thousands-attend-tet-festival-seattle/281-f296197c-fbd0-476e-a823-e9f7bebb6885</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle is ringing in the new year with the beat of its own drum. You may think it's late to the party, but this celebration is actually starting the festivities early to kick off "Tết," the Vietnamese New Year, which is just a week away on Sunday, Jan. 22.</p> <p>"Tết is a very important holiday for the Vietnamese culture, just for time to reset for the new year get things out of the way and start fresh so we really like to go all big and all out, come together with our families and celebrate the good times together that we have," said Michelle Tran, the associate director for Tết In Seattle, the non-profit organization that put on the 27th annual "Tết Festival" at Seattle Center over the weekend.</p>

	<p>This is the first fully in-person festival they've had since 2020 and organizers say it's the biggest one yet, with more than 20,000 visitors attending the two-day event.</p> <p>"It feels great, everyone's having a great time we're having music, lion dance, local performers, just touching on the Vietnamese traditions and culture and just showing for all the Seattle community can enjoy," said Tran.</p> <p>The festival is showcasing 20 performers and 28 vendors. One of those vendors is Cloud and Cream Cakery.</p> <p>"It's my first time, being in this event, I'm just so surprised of how many people there are," said Rum Guan the manager of the small business. Guan said she's honored to be a part of the festival and hopes people will continue to support and embrace Asian cultures and businesses not only during the new year, but year-round.</p> <p>"There's Christmas, Thanksgiving all those American festivals but of course it's important to know other cultures we can see a lot of local people here, it's good to introducing them to new culture, new food, new events," said Guan.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Oregon gov. ends term in flurry of pardons</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/oregon-governor-ends-term-with-flurry-of-pardons/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/oregon-governor-ends-term-with-flurry-of-pardons/</a>
GIST	<p>In her final hours on the job, Gov. Kate Brown <a href="#">released a list</a> of the latest men and women to receive clemency on her watch, including 10 people who had been sentenced to spend the rest of their lives in prison.</p> <p>Brown <a href="#">made clemency a centerpiece</a> of her eight-year administration, speaking about it in near-spiritual terms at a Princeton University talk she gave last month when she told the audience that showing mercy can "save the world."</p> <p>Brown became among the country's most enthusiastic governors to exercise clemency authority, drawing cheers from those who want a system that prioritizes rehabilitation over punishment and sharp criticism from some crime victims who accused the governor of overlooking them and deepening their trauma.</p> <p>By the time she left office, Brown had made significant and lasting decisions using her broad clemency powers, including effectively ending the death penalty, pardoning nearly 50,000 people with convictions for possession of small amounts of marijuana and making an <a href="#">estimated 73 juvenile offenders</a> who were convicted in the adult court system eligible to pursue parole once they've served 15 years.</p> <p>There was more: She commuted the sentences of nearly 1,000 people <a href="#">in response to the COVID-19 pandemic</a> and about three dozen more as <a href="#">a reward for their firefighting efforts</a> in the historic 2020 wildfires.</p> <p>Her staff also pored over hundreds of individual requests for clemency from people serving time in Oregon's prisons, ultimately rejecting an estimated 1,400 applications in the past year alone, according to a letter Brown sent to the Legislature last week.</p> <p>In all, she commuted 104 individual cases during her tenure and granted 130 pardons. Those include 35 commutations and 68 pardons in her final 10 months.</p> <p>Clemency includes commutations and pardons. A commutation is a reduction in a person's sentence. A pardon forgives a person for the crime they committed. A law passed in 2019 ensures that those who receive pardons have their convictions erased from the record.</p>

About three-quarters of those who received commutations were men and nearly two-thirds were people of color, according to demographic data compiled by Aliza Kaplan, a Lewis & Clark Law School professor and an authority on clemency. Brown has cited Kaplan as influential in her thinking about clemency.

Not everyone whose sentence Brown commuted will be automatically released; in some cases, they are now eligible to seek parole.

A spokesperson for Brown said the former governor was traveling last week and unavailable for comment.

Speaking at Princeton a few weeks ago, Brown called clemency an “incredibly useful tool to correct injustices.”

She talked about her fervent belief in second chances and her dismay over the rise in the prison population as a result of mandatory minimum sentencing laws. She nodded to the political blowback that tends to accompany clemency decisions, saying, “I have to put on my metal underpants on a regular basis.”

“It’s much easier to sow fear and anger than it is to build compassion and understanding and healing in our communities, to create a beloved community,” said Brown, a former family law attorney in Portland.

She highlighted the case of a woman who was convicted in 2003 of felony murder. The former governor told the audience that the woman did not pull the trigger in the case but accompanied the man who did.

Brown explained how the woman was transformed in prison and became worthy of redemption. She noted the woman is Black, gay and was convicted by an all-white jury.

“These are the types of people that we are giving a second chance to,” Brown said. “It is an opportunity, I think, to save lives and eventually save the world and we all have to engage with every fiber of our being in this work.”

#### **“Governor of inmates”**

Last summer, after some crime victims lashed out at Brown for failing to consider their perspectives, she [brought in a longtime chaplain at the Oregon State Penitentiary as a victim impact liaison](#). In her letter to the Legislature, Brown pointed to cases where Karuna Thompson kept victims apprised of the clemency review process.

The new position made little difference, said Rosemary Brewer, executive director of the Oregon Crime Victims Law Center.

Last month, for instance, victims received two hours notice before Brown announced she would commute the sentences of those who had been sentenced to death, Brewer said. Brown converted those sentences to life without parole.

She said the governor’s record on clemency shows a failure to strike a balance between the rights of criminal defendants and those of crime victims.

“I don’t understand how you can’t have any awareness of what’s going on for these people, the amount of trauma they have suffered and not have empathy,” Brewer said. “It shows a real lack of understanding, a lack of wanting to understand what somebody is going through.”

“She’s not just governor of inmates,” Brewer said. “She represents all of us.”

The 2021 commutations of dozens of juvenile offenders ranked among Brown’s most controversial moves. The governor created parameters for some juvenile offenders accused of the most serious crimes to have a shot at parole.

Dylan Arthur, executive director of the Oregon Board of Parole and Post-Prison Supervision, said that a couple of juvenile defendants were released after their sentences were commuted and about 24 others were immediately eligible to seek parole. The rest, he said, may begin the process once they've served 15 years.

He said the board has held one hearing so far, deciding to grant parole to Timothy Espinosa, 41, who was convicted of two counts of aggravated murder for the 1998 killing of Fidencio Ceja, 17, and Juan Torres, 18, in Salem. Espinosa was sentenced to life with the possibility of parole after 25 years. Espinosa was 17 at the time of the crimes.

Of the 35 people whose sentences Brown commuted in the final 10 months of her administration, 29 involved defendants serving time for violent crime, including 15 who were convicted of killing someone. Ten of them received true life sentences.

Among those who received commutations were Randall Clegg and Reschard Steward, who are both 48. The two were found guilty of aggravated murder and sentenced to life without parole for their roles in plotting and carrying out the killing of Christina "Tina" L. Clegg in July 1993.

### **Race, age factor in**

Tina Clegg's fatal shooting at the Albina Head Start, where she worked as a receptionist, rocked Portland at the time and dominated headlines.

The shooters also shot a woman who survived. She opposed clemency for all three men.

Tina Clegg's husband, Grover Clegg, now 57, was convicted of aggravated murder for his role as the mastermind in his wife's slaying. Brown rejected his bid for clemency. Randall Clegg is his brother.

All three men have long maintained their innocence.

Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt wrote to Brown that he remained "troubled" by the Cleggs' lack of remorse for the murder and the pain it caused.

"I'm still concerned by the petition's failure to recognize Tina Clegg: at most Grover's wife and the mother of his children, at least an innocent person who lost her life through no fault of her own," Schmidt wrote.

Yet Schmidt supported making the Cleggs and Steward eligible to seek parole after they have served at least 30 years, saying they no longer pose a public safety threat and that the sentence of life without parole should be reserved for "extraordinary cases."

The sentence, Schmidt wrote, conveys to a defendant that they "are undeserving of any kind of mercy," are "beyond redemption" and the community will not be safe unless they are "permanently removed from it."

"For the Cleggs," Schmidt wrote, "not one of these justifications are true any longer."

Kendra Hughes, a witness to the shooting, said the governor's victim liaison came to her home in November to discuss the clemency applications for Randall Clegg and Steward.

She said Thompson told her Brown's considerations included the defendants' ages at the time of the killing and the role race played in the case. The two lead detectives, prosecutors, judge and jury were white. The Cleggs and Steward are Black.

"I told her white guilt is showing up in all this leniency," Hughes, who is Black, told The Oregonian/OregonLive in an interview last week. "A Black man killed a Black woman in the Black community and was intentional about it and did it in her workplace, an upstanding organization in the Black community. I wasn't buying it."

	<p>Records show that two years earlier, Thompson herself had written the governor a letter supporting clemency for the Cleggs. Of Randall Clegg, Thomson wrote that he “demonstrated tremendous interest in self reflection.” Thompson returned to her chaplain position at the state penitentiary recently.</p> <p>In explaining her decision, Brown wrote to the Legislature that Randall Clegg and Steward’s “continued incarceration does not serve the best interests of the State of Oregon.” Both men were released last month.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/14 Nurses are striking and quitting in droves</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/01/14/nurses-strike-staffing-unions/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/01/14/nurses-strike-staffing-unions/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>This flu season, Benny Matthew – a nurse at the Montefiore Medical Center emergency room in the Bronx – has often been responsible for 15 to 20 patients at a time.</p> <p>By 3 p.m. most days, the emergency room is often exploding with patients, Matthew said. Hospital gurneys stand inches apart. When beds run out, patients squeeze into tightly packed chairs. When the chairs run out, patients must stand. Wait times to see a doctor can be up to six hours. At the same time, the hospital is advertising more than 700 nursing positions.</p> <p>“We go home feeling like failures,” Matthew said. “There are times when you can’t sleep because you’re thinking: ‘Did I do anything wrong today?’”</p> <p>Matthew is one of more than 7,000 union nurses who went on strike in New York City last week, protesting staffing levels, which led to two of the city’s largest nonprofit hospital systems to agree to strengthen staffing ratios at some hospitals. On Thursday, hundreds of health-care workers from around the country protested understaffing at HCA Healthcare, the nation’s largest hospital system. That included one worker from El Paso who recently admitted herself into her own emergency room for dehydration and exhaustion after working four 12-hour days in a row, her union said.</p> <p>These tensions have continued to play out over the past month, as nurses have also protested, gone on strike or threatened strikes in California, Oregon, Michigan and Minnesota.</p> <p>Understaffing concerns have been at the heart of labor disputes in myriad industries in recent months, including an averted national rail strike threat, but perhaps nowhere have these tensions been more pronounced than in health care and nursing. Nurses led a quarter of the top 20 major work stoppages tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2022.</p> <p>While understaffing has plagued some hospitals and medical centers nationwide for years, the pandemic added new layers of stress, as nurses worked through consecutive coronavirus outbreaks that killed and disabled thousands of health-care workers. The upswing of flu and respiratory diseases in the past several months has only worsened the situation.</p> <p>With no end in sight, legions of nurses have left the field, retired early or switched jobs. Some 100,000 nurses left the industry between 2020 and 2021, according to an industry trade-journal estimate. Although there were 4.4 million registered nurses with active licenses as of 2021, according to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, only 3 million people were employed as nurses, according to the Department of Labor.</p> <p>Those who have remained have faced increasingly heavy workloads. They also gained more leverage in the tight labor market, leading nurses to organize new unions and even walk away from jobs to join the ranks of traveling nurses who parachute in from out of town to fill staffing gaps and tend to be paid more.</p> <p>“The issue is that we are understaffed, not only in my facility, but really across the nation,” said Cathy Kennedy, president of the California Nurses Association, which represents 100,000 nurses in the state. “We are seeing an upsurge of nurses that are saying, ‘We’ve had enough. We want to organize. We really want our hospital to hear what we have to say.’”</p>

The New York-based hospital company Montefiore did not respond to a request for comment about staffing levels. But the company touted the agreement reached by negotiators and the hospital late Wednesday that ended the strike, with some big concessions for nurses. The agreement includes a 19.1 percent raise over three years, 170 new nursing positions and emergency-room staffing ratios based on the severity of patient needs.

Harlow Sumerford, a spokesperson for HCA Healthcare, said Thursday's protest was "an expected tactic as we are set to begin our regular cycle of bargaining with the labor union in the next few weeks." He noted that the hospital system staffs its "teams appropriately and in compliance with state regulations."

In the years leading into the pandemic, there were roughly enough new nurses entering the pipeline to replace the ones that retired, according to a 2022 McKinsey & Co report titled "Assessing the lingering impact of COVID-19 on the nursing workforce." But covid changed everything. "Over the past two years, McKinsey found that nurses consistently, and increasingly, report planning to leave the workforce at higher rates compared with the past decade," the report found, a trend that continued even as covid cases fell.

From coast to coast, mounting nursing shortages have triggered a widespread set of issues for nurses and patients, according to conversations with nine nurses. Nurses say there have been significant declines in patient care, including delayed cancer treatments and critical checkups for expecting mothers. Medications are administered late or missed altogether. The shortage has also taken a toll on nurses' mental and physical health, as they are forced to skip meal and rest breaks and get little recovery time between shifts.

Organized strikes, and even the threat of strikes, have succeeded in pushing some hospitals to agree to address some staffing concerns. This winter nurses have won guarantees of investment in new hires, a bigger role in shaping nurse-to-patient ratios, and strong wage gains that could help with retention.

In Kalamazoo, Mich., 300 nurses – as part of the Michigan Nurses Association – won a 20 percent raise in the first year of their contract, after threatening to strike at Ascension Borgess hospital over staffing levels in December. Night nurse Lori Batzloff said the pay increase should help retain nurses. But she is concerned about her hospital's ability to weather another covid outbreak.

Last September, in Minnesota, 15,000 nurses went on strike for three days over understaffing concerns, in the largest-ever private nurses' strike. When hospitals still refused to concede to their demands, the nurses threatened to walk out a second time, for three weeks in December. With days to go before the strike deadline, more than a dozen hospitals, for the first time, agreed to give nurses a say in staffing levels, averting the strike.

"I think the hospitals looked around and understood that they couldn't withstand, frankly, a 15,000-member three-week strike in Minnesota," said Chris Rubesch, vice president of the Minnesota nurses union. "That would be crippling."

A Twin Cities Hospital group spokesman said in a press statement when the deal was struck that the new agreement shows that hospitals and labor can work together to "develop staffing language the meets the unique needs" of hospitals, nurses and patients.

For other health-care workers who typically earn less than nurses – such as health-care technicians, dietitians and nursing assistants – the impacts of understaffing are just as bad.

"There is no morale left," said Gregorio Oropeza, an admitting representative who registers patients at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Marina del Rey, Calif. Oropeza has colleagues who have had to drop out of the workforce after suffering severe symptoms from covid. "Everyone is there because they need a paycheck. They're terrified of getting sick, but it is a job and they have to uphold a household."



Oropeza and 400 of his colleagues went on a five-day strike with SEIU-United Healthcare Workers West in December over understaffing and pay concerns, but union contract negotiations have continue to stall.

Marni Usherooff, a spokesperson for Cedars-Sinai Marina del Rey, said the hospital recognizes that its employees are its “most important asset” and that during contract negotiations, the hospital has shown its “commitment to maintain staffing levels that provide important support for our health care workers.”

During the coronavirus pandemic, nurses have been organizing and winning union elections, even as unionization rates in the United States have declined.

“I remember in the middle of the pandemic, predicting that once the dust settles, there could be an explosion of new organizing and strikes to accomplish safe staffing levels,” said Sal Rosselli, president of the National Union of Healthcare Workers, which represents 15,000 health-care employees in California. “And that’s what’s happening now.”

While some nurses are organizing, many have dropped out of the field entirely or plan to leave the industry. A 2022 survey by the staffing agency ShiftMed found that two-thirds of nurses say they are inclined to leave the profession within the next two years.

Some nurses have quit their full-time jobs to take on highly lucrative contract work, traveling to other parts of the country and temporarily filling in at short-staffed hospitals. The option has become popular among younger nurses, in particular many who are looking to pay off student loans. Demand for travel nurses is roughly double what it was at the start of the pandemic, although it has tempered since the height of outbreak, according to April Hansen, an executive at Aya Healthcare, the country’s largest travel-nurse agency.

Nurses unions say hospitals are to blame for nursing shortage problems, noting that health-care companies made a deliberate choice not to devote resources to hiring more nurses. Many hospitals profited during the pandemic, receiving millions in covid-related aid, rewarding investors with generous stock buybacks and paying executives seven-figure salaries. In the Bronx, the CEO of Montefiore, Philip Ozuah, took home \$7.4 million in 2020.

“I feel that hospital administrators are hypocrites,” said Zulma Gutierrez, 42, an intensive care unit nurse at Montefiore who went on strike this week. “They’re going home making millions and we’re going home with guilt.”

But a growing and aging population, combined with the continued waves of covid, mean demand for nurses will continue to soar in the coming years. By 2025, the United States is projected to be between 200,000 and 450,000 nurses short, according to the McKinsey report.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Iran executes dual-UK citizen for spying</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/14/iran-alireza-akbari-execution-hanging/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/14/iran-alireza-akbari-execution-hanging/</a>
GIST	<p>LONDON — Iran executed Alireza Akbari, a dual British citizen who previously served as a senior defense official in Tehran, in what British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak described as “a callous and cowardly act, carried out by a barbaric regime with no respect for the human rights of their own people.”</p> <p>Mizan, a news service linked to the Iranian judiciary, said early Saturday that Akbari had been hanged without providing details on when the <a href="#">execution</a> took place. It previously said that Akbari had been sentenced to death for carrying out espionage activities on behalf of MI6, the British foreign intelligence service. Iran has a history of making unsupported claims of <a href="#">espionage</a> when it makes arrests.</p> <p>“This will not stand unchallenged,” said British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly in a statement, adding that Britain would summon Tehran’s top diplomat in London “to make clear our disgust at Iran’s actions.”</p>

The British Foreign Office previously said it had lobbied Tehran for Akbari's release but was not granted consular access. Iran does not recognize dual citizenship. The Foreign Office announced sanctions in the form of a travel ban and asset freeze on Iranian Prosecutor General Jafar Montazeri in hopes of sending a "wider signal" on Britain's "commitment to backing condemnation with action."

Vedant Patel, deputy spokesman at the State Department, on Friday called the Iranian charges "politically motivated" and said the [execution](#) would be "unconscionable."

The theocratic regime in Iran has launched a brutal crackdown on demonstrators after a wave of anti-government protests began in September. Tehran has [executed](#) at least four people in relation to the protests, while at least 520 demonstrators have been killed, [according](#) to the Human Rights Activists News Agency. Iran has repeatedly made the unsupported claim that Western powers and Israel were behind the demonstrations.

Akbari's wife told BBC Persian earlier this week that he had been taken to solitary confinement and that relatives had been told that any visit to Akbari would be his last. She added that he had been detained for over three years.

Akbari, who was 61, had served as deputy defense minister during the administration of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, a cleric who favored reform and was in [power](#) between 1997 and 2005. During this time, Akbari served under defense minister Ali Shamkhani, now the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran and at whose invitation Akbari returned to Iran before he was arrested, Akbari's [brother](#) told BBC Persian.

Akbari also played a role in the cease fire that ended a bloody eight-year war with Iraq in 1988, according to the Associated Press. He [reportedly](#) lived in Britain for over 10 years.

Iranian state media this week broadcast a highly edited video showing Akbari's alleged confessions and claimed that Akbari had received more than \$2.3 million in return for spying for Britain after being initially contacted by British intelligence agents during a visa interview at the embassy in Tehran.

One caption in the confession video said Akbari had provided information about Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an Iranian nuclear [scientist](#) killed in an attack outside Tehran in 2020. In a later section, the video said he had been arrested for spying in 2008 but traveled to Britain after he was released on bail.

BBC Persian released a recording it said Akbari made from prison. In it, Akbari said he had been threatened with death if he did not confess. Akbari said his "will was broken" and he was "driven to the point of insanity" by torture and psychedelic drugs during more than 3,500 hours of interrogations.

Iran had "no proof" of the claims against him and had acted to "take revenge" against Britain, he said, adding that he had been accused of obtaining information from Shamkhani "in exchange for a bottle of perfume and a shirt."

Research [published](#) last year, cited by the British Parliament, suggests that least 66 foreign or dual nationals have been arrested by Iran since 2010, including around 15 Britons. They include British Iranian Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe, who was freed last year [following](#) six years of imprisonment and house arrest in Iran.

In November, Iranian state media reported that another British national, who also holds Iranian citizenship, was arrested on accusations of communicating with foreign news channels, [according](#) to Reuters.

Dissidents based abroad have also faced threats in recent years. Jamshid Sharmahd, a German Iranian citizen and California resident in his 60s, was allegedly [kidnapped](#) during a flight layover in Dubai in August 2020 and taken to Iran, where he was accused of leading a "terrorist" group, a charge he denies. His [daughter](#) said he faces the death penalty after being accused of "corruption on earth."

	In 2019, Ruhollah Zam, a prominent exiled journalist living in France, was arrested and extradited to Iran after being lured across the border to Iraq. He, like Akbari, was also convicted of “corruption on earth” and was executed in December 2020.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Bakhmut siege poses risks for Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/15/bakhmut-wagner-battle-strategy/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/15/bakhmut-wagner-battle-strategy/</a>
GIST	<p>Ukraine faces difficult choices about how much deeper its military should get drawn into a protracted fight over the besieged city of Bakhmut, as Kyiv prepares for a new counteroffensive elsewhere on the front that requires conserving weapons, ammunition and experienced fighters.</p> <p>Russia has escalated its assault in the area in recent days, unleashing savage fighting that has underscored the high cost of the battle. Russian mercenaries and released convicts from the Wagner group pushed into the neighboring salt-mining town of Soledar and inched closer to Bakhmut, the capture of which has eluded them for months despite an advantage in firepower and the willingness to sacrifice troops.</p> <p>“When we kill five out of 10 of their soldiers at once, they are replenished again to 10 over the course of several hours,” said Andriy Kryshchenko, a deputy battalion commander of a National Guard unit posted to the south of the city.</p> <p>“Although they storm in small groups, people are constantly replenished, which creates an opportunity for them to storm positions very often — sometimes five, six, seven times during the day,” Kryshchenko said.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military must now decide how many more forces and how much more ammunition and weaponry it can expend to continue defending Bakhmut — a city that many military analysts view as having relatively little strategic significance to the broader battlefield, but which has become freighted with political symbolism for both sides.</p> <p>The decisions come as Ukrainian officials — awaiting an <a href="#">influx of new armored vehicles</a> promised by the U.S., France and Germany — say they are preparing to launch a new counteroffensive in the coming months to try to wrest back more territory from the Russians. Success in that campaign would be critical for President Volodymyr Zelensky to demonstrate continued momentum on the battlefield and retain domestic and international support in a war now in its eleventh month.</p> <p>“They need to have units out of combat that they are equipping and training up for this offensive,” said Michael Kofman, a Russian military analyst at Virginia-based CNA. “This is why Bakhmut is a battle that I think was advantageous to Ukraine, but now there are questions about how much the cost of fighting for Bakhmut could impede Ukraine’s overall strategy for this winter or spring.”</p> <p>Starting in mid-2022, Wagner leader Yevgeniy Prigozhin set his sights on capturing Bakhmut to show the Kremlin that, unlike Russia’s beleaguered military, which was retreating from positions, his private mercenary army remained capable of taking initiative and capturing new territory on the battlefield.</p> <p>Many military analysts viewed the move as strategic folly, watching as the Russians suffered grave losses, wasting droves of primarily mercenary and ex-convict troops, as well as ammunition and weaponry, in pursuit of a city with relatively little strategic significance for the wider war.</p> <p>The Ukrainians for months seemed to be succeeding in causing Russian attrition over a questionable target. Moscow has thrown tens of thousands of troops into the fight, according to a senior U.S. official, who spoke anonymously to discuss sensitive military details, and has lost thousands of those men in the battle for Bakhmut.</p> <p>But in recent weeks, the Ukrainian city that once housed 70,000 people has become imbued with additional political symbolism on both sides. For the Russians, its capture would allow Moscow to tout a much-needed victory and claim momentum in a war in which its forces haven’t captured a major city since</p>

last summer. For the Ukrainians, Bakhmut has been trumpeted by officials as a “fortress” and an icon of a superhuman resistance, making even a calculated retreat politically fraught.

Zelensky visited the city late last year and in a subsequent speech to Congress, compared it to the Battle of Saratoga, the turning point of the Revolutionary War. He presented a flag signed by defenders of the city to Vice President Harris and then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. Ukrainians regularly repeat the slogan, “Bakhmut holds,” as the latest sign of unwavering resistance in the face of a brutal Russian war.

Ukraine is under pressure to launch a new counteroffensive in coming months — and fend off any new campaigns by a Russian force buttressed with newly mobilized soldiers — at a time when attrition is testing its reserves of trained fighters and ammunition.

The top general in the United States, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark A. Milley, said in November that [Russia and Ukraine had each seen about 100,000 of their troops killed or wounded](#) since the start of the conflict in February 2022, a staggering toll that underscores the challenges posed by a war of attrition.

The United States and its allies have approved new military aid for Ukraine in recent days, preparing to ship armored fighting vehicles designed to help Ukrainian forces in a new campaign. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Wednesday that the fierce fighting around Bakhmut showed “how vital it is that we step up our support, our military support to Ukraine.”

Top Ukrainian military officials regularly emphasize that trained and motivated fighters are the most precious resource in Kyiv’s arsenal, taking pains to plan operations to ensure the fewest losses possible. But Bakhmut has become a brutal slog, as Russia dumps thousands of fighters on the front, testing Ukrainian forces with wave after wave of personnel.

A Ukrainian commander, who recently fought in the city and spoke on the condition of anonymity to be candid about the battle, described “great losses” within his unit.

“As for the symbolism, to each his own,” the commander said. “But we have lost many friends in the defense of this city, so we do not want to surrender it now. But maybe a temporary withdrawal would save some of our people.”

Andriy Miheychenko, the 42-year-old commander of a unit in Ukraine’s 53rd Mechanized Brigade, who was fighting in Bakhmut until late December, described the Russian mercenary fighters as a “cheap resource” — dying in very large numbers while proving relatively ineffective.

“Prigozhin and those guys, they’ve been fighting for how many months?” he said. “But Bakhmut is still ours. ... On the other hand, it’s a shame because we’re exchanging the lives of our soldiers and officers — very good officers — for the lives of these Russian convicts.”

Officials in Kyiv, from Zelensky down, have regularly emphasized that every piece of Ukrainian territory must be fought for, noting they are unwilling to abandon Ukrainian citizens to Russian occupation.

“For us, Bakhmut is the same corner of our country as Soledar, Kherson, Melitopol, Kharkiv or Dnipro. It is our native land. We fight and will fight for every meter of our land,” said Yuriy Skala, the commander of an intelligence battalion currently fighting in Bakhmut. “But we will fight smartly: If the circumstances require a tactical maneuver, the top military leadership will surely make the right conclusions and actions.”

“I will support the commander in chief’s decision to maneuver tactically and create a new line of defense if it becomes clear that casualties are too high,” Skala added. “We are not Russians. We are Ukrainians, and human life is the highest value for us.”

Mason Clark, a senior analyst and Russia team lead at the Institute for the Study of War, said he would be surprised if Ukrainian military officials allowed their force in Bakhmut to suffer a level of attrition

	<p>significant enough to impact their ability to launch a counteroffensive elsewhere, noting that commanders have demonstrated astute operational planning.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military is cognizant of the need to preserve forces for a coming counteroffensive, the senior U.S. official said.</p> <p>“They are still fighting, but they aren’t fighting with the same amount of resources that they originally were, because they likewise share concerns about sustainability here,” the official said.</p> <p>The Ukrainians are not “giving up the ghost,” the official said. “They are marshaling their forces appropriately.”</p> <p>The senior U.S. official cautioned against completely dismissing Bakhmut or neighboring Soledar as nonstrategic places that Kyiv can simply relinquish, noting that the salt and gypsum mines give the area economic significance.</p> <p>Theoretically, the Russians could use the deep salt mines and tunnels to protect equipment and ammunition from Ukrainian missile strikes. Moscow has also endowed the city with import.</p> <p>“To some degree, Bakhmut matters to [Ukraine] because it matters so much to the Russians,” the senior U.S. official said, noting that control of Bakhmut is not going to have a huge impact on the conflict or imperil Ukraine’s defensive or offensive options in the country’s eastern Donbas region.</p> <p>The official added, “Bakhmut is not going to change the war.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Bird flu sends egg prices up in western WA</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3780224/bird-flu-sends-egg-prices-soaring-as-western-washington-shoppers-feel-the-strain/">https://mynorthwest.com/3780224/bird-flu-sends-egg-prices-soaring-as-western-washington-shoppers-feel-the-strain/</a>
GIST	<p>Western Washington shoppers say they’re feeling the sting of soaring egg prices. According to <a href="#">the Consumer Price Index</a>, over the last year egg prices have gone up 60% nationwide.</p> <p>Fred Meyer is now limiting customers to two cartons each. According to spokesperson Tiffany Sanders, the avian influenza — commonly known as bird flu — has caused a major disruption in the U.S. supply chain. As of a week ago, a staggering 58 million birds were infected.</p> <p>“Fred Meyer’s egg supply remains adequate,” said Sanders. “However, to maintain a supply that can continue to serve to serve customers, we are temporarily limiting in-store egg purchases.”</p> <p>Another regional grocer, PCC Community Markets, says panic buying isn’t helping the crisis either. Grocery merchandiser Noah Smith contends PCC’s egg supply has not been as impacted as other retailers because it’s locally sourced.</p> <p>“When the national guys starting get hit with that, that’s taking big numbers of eggs out of the entire supply chain,” said Smith. “I haven’t had too many reports of our local producers suffering.”</p> <p>Turns out, sourcing eggs locally has saved Snohomish’s Grain Artisan Bakery from soaring costs, too. Owner Lauren Anderson orders thirty dozen eggs a week from her supplier.</p> <p>“I really believe that cutting out the middle man is good for both of us,” said Anderson. “We’re not running into the chicken-egg crisis that most people are running into sourcing from the grocery stores.”</p> <p>Anderson says the supplier before this one had some major issues. That producer decided to cull their entire flock due to rising feed costs, coyote problems and the avian flu.</p>

	“They didn’t feel consciously good about continuing to pass on that increase to their customers,” said Anderson.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Tunisia: thousands march anti-govt protest</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/thousands-protest-against-tunisian-president-kais-saied-seizure-of-near-total-power">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/thousands-protest-against-tunisian-president-kais-saied-seizure-of-near-total-power</a>
GIST	<p>Thousands of protesters in central Tunis have marched against the seizure of near total power by the Tunisian president, Kais Saied, demanding he step down as they marked the anniversary of a key date in the 2011 revolution that brought democracy.</p> <p>The central Habib Bourguiba avenue, the traditional site for major demonstrations, was crowded with thousands of protesters waving Tunisian flags, amid chants of “the people demand the fall of the regime”.</p> <p>A heavy police presence remained outside the interior ministry building on the street, along with water cannon.</p> <p>“Tunisia is going through the most dangerous time in its history. Saied took control of all authority and struck at democracy. The economy is collapsing. We will not be silent,” said Said Anouar Ali, a 34-year-old demonstrator.</p> <p>Protesters had pushed past police and metal barricades to reach the avenue, defying initial efforts by the authorities to keep separate several parallel protests that had been called by different political parties and civil society organisations.</p> <p>“We were on Bourguiba in January 2011 when Saied was not present ... today, he is closing Bourguiba to us. We will reach it whatever the price,” said Chaima Issa, an activist who took part in the 2011 revolution before the crowd pushed through the barriers.</p> <p>Another major opposition political party, aligned with the pre-revolution autocracy, held a separate rally in central Tunis after it was banned from marching near the presidential palace in Carthage.</p> <p>Saied shut down the elected parliament in 2021 and began to reshape the political system, but low turnout for December’s election of a new, mostly powerless, legislature revealed little public appetite for his changes.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the economy is failing, with staple goods disappearing from shelves, and the government has not yet been able to secure an international bailout with state finances facing bankruptcy.</p> <p>The main political forces, including most parties and the labour union, oppose Saied’s project, with many of them calling it an anti-democratic coup.</p> <p>However, they have failed to repair deep ideological and personal fissures that divided them for years rather than forming a united front.</p> <p>Many parties still reject a role for the biggest party, the Islamist Ennahda. The powerful UGTT labour union seeks a national dialogue but will not invite any party that accuses Saied of a coup.</p> <p>The protests come 12 years to the day after the ousting of former autocrat, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and 14 January is seen by most Tunisian parties and civil society groups as the anniversary of the revolution.</p> <p>However, Saied unilaterally changed the official anniversary date and has said he regards 14 January as a moment when the revolution went astray.</p>



	While there has been no major crackdown on opponents of Saied, and police have allowed most protests against him, their handling of demonstrations on 14 January last year was more forceful, prompting condemnation from rights activists.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Day 326 of the Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/15/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-326-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/15/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-326-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Russia carried out <a href="#">two mass rocket attacks on Ukraine</a></b> on Saturday, devastating an apartment block in Dnipro and leaving <b>at least 14 people dead and 64 injured</b>, at least a dozen of them children. Rescue efforts were ongoing in the south-central city on Sunday. At least one person was also killed in a separate strike on a residential area in the nearby city of Kryvyi Rih. Ukrainian authorities said the targets were the country's energy infrastructure.</li> <li>• <b>The UK prime minister has confirmed <a href="#">the country will provide tanks to Ukraine</a></b> to help Kyiv's forces "push Russian troops back". Downing Street said Rishi Sunak made the pledge during a call on Saturday morning with the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, and that Sunak offered Challenger 2 tanks and additional artillery systems as a sign of the UK's "ambition to intensify our support to Ukraine". Russia's embassy in Britain said the move would only "intensify" the conflict.</li> <li>• <b>Emergency power outages were enacted across 11 regions of Ukraine</b> after Russian strikes on energy infrastructure. In a post on Telegram, grid operator Ukrenegro said the consumption limits in force across the country were exceeded in 11 regions, as a result of which "emergency shutdowns have been applied".</li> <li>• <b>Four explosions were heard in central Kyiv on Saturday morning.</b> For the first time since Russia began regular missile and drone attacks on the capital in autumn, the air raid sirens sounded after the attack. Until now, the sirens have sounded 10-90 minutes before an attack, giving residents time to seek shelter.</li> <li>• <b>Air raid alerts were also issued across the country</b>, including in the major cities of Kherson and Lviv. Alerts were also issued for the regions of Kharkiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk and about a dozen others.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine has called on its allies to give it more support after its troops suffered heavy losses in fighting at Soledar and Bakhmut</b> in recent months. Russia said on Friday its forces had taken control of Soledar in east Ukraine, its first claim of victory in months of battlefield setbacks, while Kyiv said fierce fighting was continuing in the town. "To win this war, we need more military equipment, heavy equipment," said Andriy Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential office, Agence France-Presse reported.</li> <li>• <b>Moldovan authorities said debris from a missile had been found in its territory</b> near the border with Ukraine. They said on Saturday the find came "after Russia's massive bombardment of Ukraine" and that it was the third time missiles from the conflict had fallen on to Moldova's territory.</li> <li>• Former Russian president <b>Dmitry Medvedev has accused the Japanese prime minister, Fumio Kishida, of shameful subservience to the US and <a href="#">suggested he should ritually disembowel himself</a></b>. His remarks on Saturday were the latest in a long line of shocking and provocative statements from arch-hawk Medvedev, Reuters reported. Speaking later on Saturday, a day after a summit with the US president, Joe Biden, Kishida made no mention of Medvedev's comment.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Russia 2 mass rocket strikes on Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/russia-carries-out-two-mass-rocket-strikes-on-ukraine-killing-at-least-five-people">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/russia-carries-out-two-mass-rocket-strikes-on-ukraine-killing-at-least-five-people</a>
GIST	Russia has carried out two mass rocket strikes on Ukraine on Saturday, devastating an apartment block in the south-central city of Dnipro, where at least 14 people have died and 64 were injured. Rescue workers are still clearing the rubble at the scene.

The targets of the attack, Ukrainian authorities said earlier on Saturday, was Ukraine's energy infrastructure, a continuation of its strategy to leave the country without power and limit its ability to fight.

During the second attack in the afternoon, one rocket hit a nine-storey apartment in Dnipro, destroying an entire stretch of the building. Rescue workers were attempting to retrieve survivors from the rubble, according to the deputy head of the presidential administration, Kyrylo Tymoshenko. He posted a picture of a crane, saying people still in their apartments were using their phones to catch the attention of rescue workers.

Tymoshenko added on Telegram that he knew the block well as he was born and lived nearby. "We will spend all night clearing up the rubble," said Tymoshenko, who was on the scene.

One video, purported to be from near the scene of the attack, showed people running away, while another showed the immediate aftermath of the strike – a courtyard covered in a thick layer of grey dust, a cloud of smoke and a woman can be heard screaming in the background.

At least 14 people, including a 15-year-old girl, were killed and 64 wounded in the attack, the Dnipropetrovsk governor, Valentyn Reznichenko, said on Telegram. Seven children were among the wounded, the youngest aged three, he added.

So far 38 people had been pulled from the rubble and the search operation was continuing, he said.

A residential house in the village of Kopyliv, Kyiv region, was also destroyed in the first attack on Saturday morning, but no casualties have been reported.

Energy facilities were hit during the attack. Power outages were reported in Kharkiv after the first attack. Ukraine's energy minister, Herman Halushchenko, said emergency shutdowns have been introduced in several cities to stabilise the grid and the "next few days will be difficult".

The morning attack in Kyiv caught residents by surprise. For the first time since Russia began launching regular attacks on the capital, the air raid siren did not sound, indicating that the missiles evaded Ukraine's radar detection systems.

Yuriy Ignat, the spokesperson for Ukraine's air defence forces, told Ukraine's United News TV programme that Russia probably used ballistic missiles in that instance and Ukraine does not have the means to destroy or detect them.

One village suffered a hit during a rocket attack on the Odeskyi district of Odesa region, and fragments of a downed missile hit transport infrastructure involved in the grain agreement, according to authorities.

The debris of a missile landed in Moldova for the second time in recent months, according to the country's interior ministry.

The latest spate of attacks came as the UK prime minister, Rishi Sunak, announced the UK would provide Ukraine with about 12 Challenger tanks as well as artillery systems.

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, thanked Sunak, saying that it would "not only strengthen us on the battlefield but also send the right signal to our other partners".

The tanks will be the most modern at Ukraine's disposal. Until now, Ukraine's allies have hesitated to provide tanks, fearing Russia would see it as an escalation.

On Friday, in a visit to Ukraine, Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, promised to give Ukraine 14 German-made Leopard tanks. But Poland needs re-export approval from Germany first.

	<p>In early January, France, Germany and the US committed to providing armoured fighting vehicles, also a first, but have thus far put off calls for tanks.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the battle for Ukraine's Donetsk region continues. Russia has claimed to have captured the town of Soledar which, if true, could make it more difficult for Ukraine to hold the neighbouring town of Bakhmut, the scene of some of the heaviest fighting in recent months.</p> <p>The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War assessed that Russia probably controls almost all of the town, but it did not think a win in Soledar would result in Russia taking over Bakhmut.</p> <p>But Ukraine's deputy defence minister, Hanna Malar, has denied the claims, stating that heavy battles continued "day and night". She said Ukrainian forces were "repelling continuous attacks by the Russian military, who are suffering heavy losses".</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Calif. storms: more wind, rain and snow hit</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/15/california-storms-thousands-without-power-as-more-wind-rain-and-snow-hit">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/15/california-storms-thousands-without-power-as-more-wind-rain-and-snow-hit</a>
GIST	<p>Storm-battered California got more wind, rain and snow on Saturday, raising flooding concerns, causing power outages and making travel dangerous.</p> <p>Bands of rain and wind started in the north and spread south, with more storms expected to follow into early next week, the National Weather Service said.</p> <p>More than 68,000 customers were without electricity on Saturday morning, a number that was cut by more than half during the afternoon, according to <a href="https://www.poweroutage.us">poweroutage.us</a>.</p> <p>US President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration for the state on Saturday, ordering federal aid to supplement state, tribal and local recovery efforts in the areas affected by the severe weather.</p> <p>The president's action makes federal funding available to affected individuals in Merced, Sacramento and Santa Cruz counties, the White House said.</p> <p>Flood warnings were issued for the region north of San Francisco Bay, including Marin, Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties.</p> <p>To the south, warnings were posted for counties including San Mateo and Santa Cruz, where the tiny community of Felton Grove along the San Lorenzo River was ordered to evacuate. An evacuation order was also issued for residents of the Wilton area in semi rural south-eastern Sacramento County. Authorities cited the threat of flooding from the Cosumnes River.</p> <p>The swollen Salinas River swamped farmland in Monterey County, and to the east, flood warnings were in effect for Merced County in the agricultural Central Valley, where the governor, Gavin Newsom, visited to take stock of storm problems.</p> <p>"The reality is that this is just the eighth of what we anticipate will be nine atmospheric rivers – we're not done," Newsom said at a briefing with local leaders where he urged people to be vigilant about safety for the next 24 to 48 hours.</p> <p>"This is happening all across California but I want to say ... you guys are disproportionately taking the brunt of it, and if you feel that way you're right," Newsom said.</p> <p>Slick roads, snow and whiteout conditions plagued highways through the Sierra Nevada.</p>

	<p>The Central Sierra Snow Lab at UC Berkeley tweeted on Saturday morning that it received 21.3in (54cm) of snow in 24 hours and that its snowpack of about 10ft (3m) was expected to grow several more feet by Monday.</p> <p>A backcountry avalanche warning was issued for the central Sierra, including the greater Lake Tahoe area.</p> <p>A series of “atmospheric rivers” – long streams of moisture that transport water vapour from the tropics, after warm water evaporates off the Pacific – have dumped rain and snow on California since late December, cutting power to thousands, swamping roads, unleashing debris flows and triggering landslides.</p> <p>At least 19 storm-related deaths have been reported, and a five-year-old boy remained missing after being swept out of his mother’s car by flood waters in San Luis Obispo County.</p> <p>Half of the deaths have involved motorists, and some could have been prevented if drivers had heeded road closure signs, said Sean Duryee, acting commissioner of the California highway patrol, during a briefing by state and federal officials on Friday.</p> <p>Dry days are in next week’s forecast for California starting on Tuesday.</p> <p>“Question will then become do we stay dry through the end of month?” the San Francisco Bay Area weather office wrote.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/15 Peru declares state of emergency in Lima</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/15/peru-declares-state-of-emergency-in-lima-after-weeks-of-protests">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/15/peru-declares-state-of-emergency-in-lima-after-weeks-of-protests</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Peru’s government has declared a state of emergency in the capital of Lima and three other regions following weeks of protests against President Dina Boluarte that have claimed at least 42 lives.</p> <p>The measure, in force for 30 days, authorises the army to intervene to maintain order and suspends several constitutional rights such as freedom of movement and assembly, according to a decree published in the official gazette on Saturday.</p> <p>In addition to the capital, the state of emergency covers the regions of Cusco and Puno and the port of Callao, adjacent to Lima.</p> <p>More than 100 roadblocks, setup by protesters to disrupt traffic, were in place across Peru on Saturday, mainly in the south, which has been the epicentre of the protests, and also around Lima.</p> <p>Authorities have, however, reopened Cusco international airport, which is vital to Peru’s tourism sector.</p> <p>On Friday Boluarte insisted she would not step down in a late-night address on state TV.</p> <p>“Some voices that have come from the violent and radical factions are asking for my resignation, provoking the population into chaos, disorder and destruction,” Boluarte said.</p> <p>“I will not resign. My commitment is with Peru.”</p> <p>In the address, Boluarte lamented that the protests had at times turned violent.</p> <p>“I cannot stop reiterating my regret for the deaths of Peruvians in these protests,” she said. “I apologise for this situation.”</p> <p>But she rejected the possibility of calling a constitutional assembly as demanded by protesters, pointing to the difficulties Peru’s neighbour Chile has had in drafting and approving a new constitution.</p>

	<p>“That cannot happen overnight,” Boluarte said.</p> <p>The mass anti-government demonstrations first broke out in early December, after then-president Pedro Castillo was ousted from office for attempting to dissolve Congress and rule by decree, seeking to prevent an impeachment vote against him.</p> <p>Castillo’s supporters have marched and barricaded streets around the South American country demanding new elections and Boluarte’s removal.</p> <p>Boluarte, who is from the same leftwing party as Castillo, has insisted she will not step down.</p> <p>Peru has faced political instability in recent years, with Boluarte the sixth person to hold the presidency in five years.</p> <p>Castillo, who was being investigated in several fraud cases during his tenure, has been remanded in custody for 18 months, charged with rebellion.</p> <p>On Friday, opposition legislator Susel Paredes told local radio that time was running out for Boluarte and that the resignation of the labor minister, Eduardo Garcia, on Thursday was “the beginning of the end” for the president.</p> <p>Two other ministers resigned Friday: the heads of the interior ministry and the ministry of women.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/14 More classified documents in Biden’s home</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/14/us/biden-classified-documents-delaware.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/14/us/biden-classified-documents-delaware.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>WASHINGTON — Five more pages containing classified information were found at President Biden’s Delaware home on Thursday, the White House said on Saturday, bringing the tally to six such pages uncovered this week.</p> <p>The additional pages, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said, were discovered hours after a White House statement on Thursday morning that cited only one that Mr. Biden’s aides had discovered the night before in a storage area adjacent to the garage of the president’s home in Wilmington.</p> <p>Thursday evening, the White House said, Justice Department officials had gone to retrieve that page, and a White House lawyer had met them to oversee the transfer. Five additional classified pages were then identified among the materials with it.</p> <p>The revelation came as Mr. Biden’s lawyers provided new details about their unfolding discovery over the past two months of classified materials from his time as vice president at his house and an office he used before beginning his 2020 campaign for the White House. Attorney General Merrick B. Garland appointed a special counsel on Thursday to investigate Mr. Biden’s handling of sensitive records.</p> <p>They also defended their decision not to be fully forthcoming about the matter. The White House has been criticized over its public disclosures, including why it did not reveal the discoveries much earlier, and why, when it acknowledged on Monday that some classified files had been found at Mr. Biden’s office on Nov. 2, it did not indicate that more had been found at his house the next month.</p> <p>Mr. Biden’s lead personal lawyer, Bob Bauer, said in a statement on Saturday that the president’s legal team had tried to balance being transparent with “the established norms and limitations necessary to protect the investigation’s integrity.”</p> <p>“These considerations require avoiding the public release of detail relevant to the investigation while it is ongoing,” he added.</p>

He cited multiple rationales: Investigators at the Justice Department could object that identifying witnesses, documents, or events as the investigation was underway could compromise their work. And revealing certain details in public also posed the risk that as more information emerged, earlier statements could prove to be “incomplete.”

It was the White House lawyer, Richard Sauber, who said in a statement early Thursday that a single-page classified document had been discovered a day earlier among stored materials in a room adjacent to the garage of Mr. Biden’s Wilmington home.

Mr. Bauer said in his Saturday statement that once Mr. Biden’s aides uncovered the document, they “left the document where it was found and suspended their search of the specific space where it was located.” They notified the Justice Department the next morning and began “arranging for the delivery of that material.”

Mr. Sauber said in a statement on Saturday that because he has security clearance, he had gone to Wilmington on Thursday evening to oversee the transfer of the document. When Justice Department personnel arrived, he continued, “five additional pages with classification markings were discovered among the material with it, for a total of six pages,” which officials “immediately took possession of.”

A person familiar with the matter said the six pages comprised more than one document.

Mr. Bauer also issued a timeline that filled in certain details.

After Mr. Biden’s personal lawyers discovered Obama-era documents on Nov. 2 in a closet of an office Mr. Biden had used at the Penn Biden Center think tank in Washington, the White House notified the National Archives and Records Administration of their discovery.

For the next eight days, Mr. Biden’s personal lawyers worked with the archives until Nov. 10, when the Justice Department informed them that it had begun a preliminary inquiry into what happened.

“Once the president’s personal attorneys heard from D.O.J., the president’s personal attorneys were in regular contact with D.O.J.,” Mr. Bauer said.

The National Archives’ inspector general told the Justice Department about the matter on Nov. 4, and the department opened an inquiry on Nov. 9.

Some critics have said the Biden team should have notified the Justice Department even earlier.

On Dec. 20, as has been known, Mr. Biden’s personal lawyers inspected the garage of the president’s Wilmington house and found what Mr. Bauer called “a small number of potential records bearing classified markings.”

According to Mr. Bauer, they stopped their search and alerted the Justice Department, which took the records from the garage the next day.

Mr. Biden’s personal lawyers were searching Mr. Biden’s houses in Wilmington and Rehoboth Beach, Del., on Jan. 11 for any additional records when they found the one-page file in the storage space in Wilmington.

“Following the search at the Wilmington residence, the attorneys proceeded to the Rehoboth residence and conducted a search there,” Mr. Bauer’s timeline said. “No potential records were identified at the Rehoboth Beach residence, and the attorneys returned to Washington, D.C., late in the evening.”

Mr. Sauber said on Saturday that Mr. Biden’s personal and White House legal teams did not anticipate releasing additional details.



	<p>“We have now publicly released specific details about the documents identified, how they were identified, and where they were found,” he said. “The appointment of the special counsel in this matter this week means we will now refer specific questions to the special counsel’s office moving forward.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Russia in biggest art heist since WWII Nazis</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/14/world/asia/ukraine-art-russia-steal.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/14/world/asia/ukraine-art-russia-steal.html</a>
GIST	<p>KHERSON, Ukraine — One morning in late October, Russian forces blocked off a street in downtown Kherson and surrounded a graceful old building with dozens of soldiers.</p> <p>Five large trucks pulled up. So did a line of military vehicles, ferrying Russian agents who filed in through several doors. It was a carefully planned, highly organized, military-style assault — on an art museum.</p> <p>Over the next four days, the Kherson Regional Art Museum was cleaned out, witnesses said, with Russian forces “bustling about like insects,” porters wheeling out thousands of paintings, soldiers hastily wrapping them in sheets, art experts barking out orders and packing material flying everywhere.</p> <p>“They were loading such masterpieces, which there are no more in the world, as if they were garbage,” said the museum’s longtime director, Alina Dotsenko, who recently returned from exile, recounting what employees and witnesses had told her.</p> <p>When she came back to the museum in early November and grasped how much had been stolen, she said, “I almost lost my mind.”</p> <p>Kherson. Mariupol. Melitopol. Kakhovsky. Museums of art, history and antiquities.</p> <p>As Russia has ravaged Ukraine with deadly missile strikes and brutal atrocities on civilians, it has also looted the nation’s cultural institutions of some of the most important and intensely protected contributions of Ukraine and its forebears going back thousands of years.</p> <p>International art experts say the plundering may be the single biggest collective art heist since the Nazis pillaged Europe in World War II.</p> <p>In Kherson, in Ukraine’s south, Ukrainian prosecutors and museum administrators say the Russians stole more than 15,000 pieces of fine art and one-of-a-kind artifacts. They dragged bronze statues from parks, lifted books from a riverside scientific library, boxed up the crumbling, 200-year-old bones of Grigory Potemkin, Catherine the Great’s lover, and even stole a raccoon from the zoo, leaving behind a trail of vacant cages, empty pedestals and smashed glass.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials say that Russian forces have robbed or damaged more than 30 museums — including several in Kherson, which was retaken in November, and others in Mariupol and Melitopol, which remain under Russian occupation. With Ukrainian investigators still cataloging the losses of missing oil paintings, ancient steles, bronze pots, coins, necklaces and busts, the number of reported stolen items is likely to grow.</p> <p>The plundering is hardly a case of random or opportunistic misbehavior by a few ill-behaved troops, Ukrainian officials and international experts say, or even a desire to turn a quick profit on the black market. Instead, they believe the thefts are a broadside attack on Ukrainian pride, culture and identity, consistent with the imperial attitude of Russia’s president, Vladimir V. Putin, who has <a href="#">constantly belittled the idea of Ukraine as a separate nation</a> and used that as a central rationale for his invasion.</p> <p>“It’s not like one soldier putting a silver chalice in his rucksack,” said James Ratcliffe, general counsel of <a href="#">The Art Loss Register</a>, a London-based organization that traces stolen art. “This is a far, far larger scale.”</p>

At one museum in Melitopol, a southern Ukrainian city that the Russians seized in the first days of the war, witnesses said that [a mysterious man in a white lab coat](#) had arrived to carefully extract, with gloves and tweezers, the most valuable objects from the collection, including gold pieces from the Scythian empire crafted 2,300 years ago. As he lifted out the priceless antiquities, a squad of Russian soldiers stood firmly behind him, in case anyone should try to stop him.

In each case of looting, witnesses — including caretakers, security guards and other museum employees, who said they had been pressured or forced to help — reported a centrally controlled expert-led operation. “Shocked is not the word. I am furious,” Oleksandr Tkachenko, Ukraine’s culture minister, said [in a broadcast interview](#) as he toured the looted Kherson art museum, visibly upset. “If they stole our heritage, they believe that we wouldn’t continue to live and to create. But we will.”

The Ukrainians have a lot of battles on their hands. [Towns in the east like Bakhmut are being pummeled](#). [Drone swarms](#) continue to take out critical infrastructure, plunging thousands into the dark. Vast swaths of territory in the south and east remain occupied, and one out of three Ukrainians has been forced to flee from home.

But even with the war raging, a group of Ukrainian lawyers and art experts are working day and night to collect evidence for what they hope will be future prosecutions of cultural crimes. From dimly lit offices in frosty buildings with no power or heat, wearing gloves and woolly hats indoors, they make meticulous lists of missing objects, comb through museum records and try to identify potential witnesses and local collaborators who might have helped the Russians steal.

The Ukrainians are also working with international art organizations, like The Art Loss Register, to track the looted pieces.

“Everyone in the art market is on red alert to look out for this material,” Mr. Ratcliffe said. “Every auction house that sees material from Ukraine is going to start asking a lot of questions.”

His organization, he said, has already registered more than 2,000 items from Ukraine believed to have been stolen and others at risk, including paintings from Kherson’s art museum and Scythian gold from Melitopol.

The Ukrainians accuse the Russians of breaking international treaties that outlaw art looting, such as the [1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict](#). Created in the wake of World War II, the treaty calls for signatories to “prohibit, prevent and, if necessary, put a stop to any form of theft” of cultural property. Both Ukraine and Russia signed it.

But the Russians have flipped the narrative and presented their actions not as theft but liberation.

“Don’t panic,” said Kirill Stremousov, Kherson’s Russia-installed deputy administrator, when he explained in October what had happened to the statues that disappeared from Kherson. He said that when the fighting stopped, the monuments would “definitely return,” and that “everything was being done for the benefit of preserving the historical heritage of the city of Kherson.”

The statues have yet to be returned. (And a few weeks later, just as Ukrainian troops were liberating Kherson, Mr. Stremousov was killed in a suspicious car crash.)

Many of the paintings looted from the Kherson art museum, including beloved classics like “Piquet on the Bank of the River. Sunset,” by the miniaturist Ivan Pokhytonov, and “Autumn Time,” by Heorhii Kurnakov, recently showed up at a museum in Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that Russia snatched from Ukraine in 2014.

The director of the museum, Andrei Malguin, offered a familiar rationale. “We have 10,000 pieces and we are inventorying them,” he told a Spanish newspaper, El País. He said his museum was keeping the collection for its own “protection.”

(Russian soldiers similarly displayed the four-legged booty they had “liberated” from Kherson’s zoo. In [videos that went viral](#) everywhere, paratroopers declared that the stolen raccoon was now their mascot, traveling with them along the front, and had been named Kherson. That led to a popular meme on the Ukrainian internet: [Saving Private Raccoon](#)).

This is hardly the first time that Russia has interfered with Ukrainian art or culture. For hundreds of years during imperial Russia and then in the 20th century during Soviet times, Moscow constantly tried to suppress the Ukrainian language and anything that would bolster Ukrainian identity.

After Russia grabbed Crimea, [Interpol, the international police organization, said that it was searching for 52 paintings by Ukrainian artists](#) that had been illegally transferred to an art museum in Simferopol, Crimea’s second-largest city, in March 2014.

So this time, when war erupted in February, Ukrainian officials were quick to wrap outdoor statues in sheaths of sandbags and move precious works of art into underground vaults. But the Russians were not so easily deterred.

In Melitopol, Russian soldiers kidnapped the art museum’s director and a caretaker and eventually found the Scythian gold hidden in cardboard boxes in the cellar.

In Kherson, after Ms. Dotsenko fled for Kyiv, pro-Russia collaborators took over the art museum. Ukrainian officials said that in August, a well-dressed delegation from Crimean museums had arrived to scout out the goods.

But they didn’t have much time. [Ukrainian forces pressed in from three sides](#). By October, Russia’s hold on Kherson was unraveling faster than anyone expected. At the art museum, Russian agents rushed to get everything out as fast as possible.

“The removal took place with the participation of museum specialists but with gross violations of the transportation and packaging of the works,” said Vitalii Tytych, a Ukrainian lawyer who is part of a special military unit documenting war crimes against the cultural heritage of Ukraine. “Paintings were taken out of the frames in a hurry, frames were broken, cultural objects were also damaged or destroyed.”

“Many works,” he lamented, “will be lost.”

Touring Kherson’s museums now is depressing. Virtually all of the thousands of oil paintings that had been stowed in the art museum’s basement — and the computer records documenting them — are gone.

“I am the daughter of an officer who raised me to be strong, but I cried for two weeks,” said Ms. Dotsenko, who has worked at the art museum for 45 years.

“No,” she corrected herself, “I didn’t cry, I sobbed. I bit the walls. I gnawed.”

Across the street, at the Kherson Museum of Local Lore, there is one shattered display case after another. Deep gouges have been cut into the floor from soldiers dragging out centuries-old artifacts. Sometimes they didn’t succeed. Denys Sykoza, an inspector of cultural objects for the Kherson government, stood in front of the remains of a delicate glass cup from the fifth century, staring at the shards.

“They broke this trying to steal it,” he said quietly. “And there was only one like it.”

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SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/lynnwood-protest-snohomish-county-opioid-treatment-center-drug-alderwood-acadia-healthcare-washington-state-city-council-boys-girls-club-little-league-department-health-doh#">https://komonews.com/news/local/lynnwood-protest-snohomish-county-opioid-treatment-center-drug-alderwood-acadia-healthcare-washington-state-city-council-boys-girls-club-little-league-department-health-doh#</a>
GIST	<p>LYNNWOOD, Wash. — Dozens of Snohomish County residents protested Saturday a proposed drug treatment facility set to open next door to Alderwood Little League and the Alderwood Boys &amp; Girls Club.</p> <p>According to a press release from Safe Lynnwood, "hundreds of Lynnwood residents, business owners and community leaders will mobilize" to protest the Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) potential approval of putting the Acadia Healthcare treatment clinic in that location. Acadia Healthcare chose the Lynnwood site for the recovery center because its Bothell location was being sold and many of its patients come from the Lynnwood area.</p> <p>City officials said they didn't find out the clinic — which is scheduled to open pending the facility's license issuance from the DOH — was coming until about a month ago and blame a miscommunication between the city's permit, planning department and city council for why they weren't made aware sooner.</p> <p>"DOH must put this project on hold to consider neighbor concerns and scrutinize Acadia Healthcare, the multi-billion dollar publicly traded company expected to operate this location," Safe Lynnwood wrote in its press release. "The Lynnwood City Council has already asked Acadia to abandon the project and move to a different location.</p> <p>"We want to be very clear, everyone in our coalition is in favor of drug addiction treatment centers in the city. But not at the expense of the safety of our children. We simply want this moved to a part of Lynnwood that is more suitable for the clients and stakeholders in the community."</p> <p>Lynnwood City Councilmember Patrick Decker was at the protest and expressed safety concerns, "what I do know, is that when you have that many individuals with chemical dependencies, there comes with them people who are seeking to prey on them. They're going to look for targets of opportunity and it won't be those patients necessarily. It'll be the families, it'll be the cars, maybe even some of the students, some of the children of the Boys and Girls Club."</p> <p>David Buck, has his practice, 'Balance Epigenetic Orthodontics,' in the same building as the proposed drug treatment clinic. He also shared his concerns at the protest.</p> <p>"I don't understand the logic of putting a methadone clinic, in the same location as a pediatric medical facility," Buck said. "I just hope that people will wake up and recognize that we have to protect children, right? Because there's a reason you don't put a strip club, next to a school."</p> <p>In a statement on Saturday, Acadia Healthcare officials told KOMO that the facility is opening on January 30th, instead of January 23rd as previously reported.</p> <p><i>We respect and fully support the Lynnwood community's right to peacefully assemble. In our time with the residents, we have witnessed their passion and commitment. It is admirable and we look forward to being a strong and positive contributor upon the anticipated opening of our facility on January 30. Shortly after the opening, we will host an open house in an effort to further inform the community on what the facility does, how it delivers treatments safely and how it will benefit many residents. We will also engage the community in monthly forums so there can be a timely exchange of information and ideas. We want to destigmatize our services to the community. And once those dialogues begin and the facility is operational, we are confident that this facility will make a positive difference in the community and that its residents will embrace the life-saving programs we have brought to Lynnwood.</i></p> <p>A spokesperson for the Washington Department of Health also told KOMO in a statement:</p> <p><i>As Acadia Health seeks to move a clinic from Bothell to Lynnwood, the role of the Department of Health is to license the facility for the health-related services it will provide. Acadia received site approval for the proposed location from The City of Lynnwood in March, and the department is now waiting for Acadia to meet some final requirements, including meeting with local governing bodies and providing an updated community relations plan before the department can make a final licensing</i></p>

	<i>decision. The public hearing on Dec. 29, 2022, was required by statute and related to the department's licensing role. DOH has heard the concerns of the residents who attended that meeting and a subsequent city council meeting, and the concerns of several council members. All of that will be taken into consideration before a final licensing decision is made.</i>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Thousands lose power in Seattle shooting</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/thousands-without-power-in-south-seattle-cause-under-investigation/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/thousands-without-power-in-south-seattle-cause-under-investigation/</a>
GIST	<p>Nearly 8,000 customers in South Seattle lost power shortly after 7 p.m. Saturday when gunshots hit electrical equipment, according to <a href="#">Seattle City Light</a>.</p> <p>The shooting in the 3900 block of South Warsaw Street also left one person with injuries that were not considered life-threatening.</p> <p>Power was restored to all City Light customers in the area by 8:45 p.m. after crews isolated the incident.</p> <p>The gunshots hit a City Light electrical conduit, which feeds underground cables. Utility crews need to pull the cables out of the ground to make repairs, said Seattle City Light spokesperson Nicole Schultz.</p> <p>A conduit is common, noncritical infrastructure that is not part of a substation, so City Light was able to move customers to different feeders and restore power in less than two hours, said media relations manager Jenn Strang.</p> <p>Strang said the gunfire likely hit the ground, damaging the equipment.</p> <p>Underground crews will make repairs Sunday, but Strang said it was not immediately clear how long repairs will take.</p> <p>It was also not immediately clear if the suspect, who authorities said had not been located, intentionally damaged the equipment.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/13 CDC: possible issue Pfizer updated vaccine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/13/health/pfizer-bivalent-booster-safety-cdc/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/13/health/pfizer-bivalent-booster-safety-cdc/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Friday that there is a <a href="#">possible safety issue</a> with the bivalent Covid-19 vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech but that it is unlikely to represent a true risk. The agency said it continues to recommend that people stay up-to-date with Covid-19 vaccines.</p> <p>The CDC said one of its vaccine safety monitoring systems – a “near real-time surveillance system” called the Vaccine Safety Datalink – detected a possible increase in a certain kind of stroke in people 65 and older who recently got one of Pfizer’s updated booster shots.</p> <p>A rapid response analysis of that signal revealed that seniors who got an bivalent booster might be more likely to have ischemic strokes within the first three weeks after their shots, compared with weeks four through six.</p> <p>Ischemic strokes, the most common form, are blockages of blood to the brain. They’re usually caused by clots.</p> <p>The Vaccine Safety Datalink, or VSD, is a network of large health systems across the nation that provides data about the safety and efficacy of vaccines through patients’ electronic health records. The CDC said it had identified possible confounding factors in the data coming from the VSD that may be biasing the data and need further investigation.</p>

Of about 550,000 seniors who got Pfizer bivalent boosters and were tracked by the VSD, 130 had strokes in the three weeks after the shot, according to a CDC official who spoke to CNN on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to share the data. None of the 130 people died.

The number of strokes detected is relatively small, said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University and a member of the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Covid-19 Vaccine Work Group.

"These strokes are not a confirmed adverse event at the moment," he said. "It's like a radar system. You're getting a blip on the radar, and you have to do further investigation to discover whether that airplane is friend or foe."

The same safety signal has not been detected with the bivalent Moderna booster, the CDC said in its notice.

The agency noted that it has looked for and failed to find the same increase in strokes in other large collections of medical records, including those maintained by Medicare, the US Department of Veterans Affairs, as well as its Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System, known as VAERS.

Neither Pfizer nor other countries that are using the vaccine have seen any increase in this kind of stroke, the agency said, and the signal was not detected in any other databases.

The CDC says that it does not recommend any change to vaccination practices at this time and that the risks of Covid-19 for older adults continue to outweigh any possible safety issues with the vaccine.

"Although the totality of the data currently suggests that it is very unlikely that the signal in VSD represents a true clinical risk, we believe it is important to share this information with the public, as we have in the past, when one of our safety monitoring systems detects a signal," the notice says.

"CDC and FDA will continue to evaluate additional data from these and other vaccine safety systems. These data and additional analyses will be discussed at the upcoming January 26 meeting of the FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee."

Pfizer said in a statement Friday, "Neither Pfizer and BioNTech nor the CDC or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have observed similar findings across numerous other monitoring systems in the U.S. and globally and there is no evidence to conclude that ischemic stroke is associated with the use of the companies' COVID-19 vaccines.

"Compared to published incidence rates of ischemic stroke in this older population, the companies to date have observed a lower number of reported ischemic strokes following the vaccination with the Omicron BA.4/BA.5-adapted bivalent vaccine."

The bivalent boosters from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna protect against the original strain of the coronavirus as well as the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants. Only about 50 million Americans ages 5 and up have gotten them since they were authorized last fall, according to CDC data.

Schaffner said he was part of a briefing Thursday with members of the Covid-19 Vaccine Work Group. He couldn't share specific details about the briefing but said the safety signal was discussed.

His biggest takeaway was that the safety surveillance system is working.

It's very likely that this is a false signal, he said, but it's being investigated, which is important.

"You want a surveillance system that occasionally sends up false signals. If you don't get any signals, you're worried that you're missing stuff."



	<p>Schaffner said he would absolutely tell people to get their Covid-19 booster if they haven't done so yet – even those 65 and older.</p> <p>“Undoubtedly, the risk of a whole series of adverse events, including hospitalization, is much, much greater with Covid-19 than it is from the vaccine,” he said.</p> <p>He also said the signal – if real – may be more a factor of numbers than an indication that one manufacturer's vaccine is riskier than the other.</p> <p>Nearly two-thirds of the people in the US who've gotten an updated booster – 32 million – have gotten Pfizer, compared with about 18 million Moderna shots.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/13 Calif. businesses face catastrophic damage</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/13/business/california-rain-small-business-impact/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/13/business/california-rain-small-business-impact/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>New YorkCNN</b> — At the end of a long wooden California pier that juts out above the Pacific Ocean sits the Wharf House. It's now almost entirely unreachable.</p> <p>The Wharf House restaurant, an iconic establishment for the residents in the seaside town of Capitola in Santa Cruz County, sits alone, boarded up, damaged, with an uncertain future. There's a large gaping hole near the middle of the pier, caused by unrelenting rain and waves that thrashed against the aging wood in recent days.</p> <p>Owner Willie Case, 82, hasn't been to his beloved restaurant since the night of January 4. He's owned it for 35 years.</p> <p>“I don't know how much damage had occurred. I've not been able to get to it,” he said.</p> <p>Powerful winter storms have unleashed heavy rain, wind, flooding and dangerous mudslides the likes of which California hasn't seen in decades. The fury had catastrophic consequences for many home and business owners.</p> <p>The persistent storms across California after <a href="#">years-long drought</a> have put tens of millions of residents under life-threatening flood, mudslide and evacuation watches.</p> <p>The rains arrived to the parched West Coast in early November and haven't let up. Much of California is getting rainfall totals that are 400% to 600% <a href="#">above average</a>. As thousands have fled their homes, the extreme weather has upended lives and businesses.</p> <p>On a typical sunny California day, a stroll along the 900-foot long Capitola pier through sea breeze and under a cloudless sky is as much a treat to diners as the ocean in front and the quaint beachfront village behind it.</p> <p>Families regularly come to the Wharf House to enjoy breakfast, lunch and dinner and live music on its upper deck.</p> <p>It's now shrouded in darkness. Case said furious waves tore out 30 to 40 feet of the pier.</p> <p>“Eight support pilings were lost in the raging water. We don't know if the water came up through the floor of the restaurant because we can't see anything,” he said.</p> <p>He's hoping a break in the storms will allow him to use drones to get a closer picture to access the full extent of the damage. “The only other way to get to it is by boat. The way the waves are beating down on the shoreline right now, I can't do that,” said Case.</p>

As he waits and hopes for the best, he worries about what repairs to his business and the pier will entail.

“Repair isn’t simple. It’s already unstable and you’ll need cranes to restore the pilings. It will take time and a lot of money,” he said. Case had difficulty getting liability insurance. “It won’t cover a business that’s over water, particularly in the event of an ‘act of God,’” he said.

### **Businesses digging out**

About 5 million people were under flood watches Wednesday as yet another atmospheric river brings more rain to California.

The flood watches are primarily in Northern and Central California, including Sacramento, the North Bay and Redding and threaten to compound an already difficult situation for residents grappling with their flood-ravaged neighborhoods.

Sam DeNicola, 30, is hoping for the best in the days ahead as he and his employees clean up Bread Bike bakery.

DeNicola, co-owner of the bakery, opened its first storefront in San Luis Obispo in California Central Coast region last summer. He said the bakery makes and sells organic, artisanal bread using California grown grains and wheat. The bakery also has a bicycle delivery service.

The business is located on low ground and a block away from downtown. On Monday, DeNicola waded through knee-high water to get to the bakery.

“There’s a creek that runs through the town and all this rain caused it to overflow,” he said.

Once he made it into the shop, he said it had fared better than he expected. “There was water damage, but luckily our floors are concrete and easy to clean and sanitize. We keep our equipment 6 inches off the ground and the water was two to four inches high,” said DeNicola.

He’s lost a few days of business and is concerned about more rain coming. That’s because he also generates additional business by selling bread at local farmer’s markets a couple of days a week.

“We might still be able to keep the shop open through the rain. But people don’t go to farmer’s markets when it rains a lot. That’s hard for us,” DeNicola said.

Ali Jansen, 44, recounts the horror of waking Monday morning and looking out of the window to see the street in front of her building turn into a river.

Jansen owns Frame Works, a custom picture framing business and art gallery in San Luis Obispo. Her 2,500-square foot store is located on the ground floor of the same building where she lives, above it, with her family.

Intense rain last weekend forced the nearby creek to overflow, pushing water over a bridge and into the streets, she said. “We must have gotten over six inches of rain in 18 hours Sunday into Monday,” she said. At first, she couldn’t wade through the water into her store.

It took a few hours to recede. When it did, the damage was clear. “There was mud and debris. Most of the artwork was on walls and was OK. But there was damage to some custom artwork,” she said.

“People entrust us with their pieces, whether it’s from Etsy or their great grandmother’s needlework, which isn’t replaceable,” she said.

Days later, Jansen is still cleaning up the store. “I’ve worked dawn to dusk. I feel that if I stop I will collapse from the pain,” she said. She needs to keep going to dry the space as quickly as she can.

“If mold sets in, that can become a huge problem,” she said. “I would have to replace the drywall. I also have asthma so I can’t risk it.” She estimates about \$10,000 in damages so far and fears it could skyrocket if she had to tackle mold.

“I’m pretty concerned,” she said.

### **Wineries faring better**

Paso Robles Chief of Fire and Emergency Services, Jonathan Stornetta, said his team is busy accessing infrastructure damage in and around the city.

The city, which is just north of San Luis Obispo, is famous for its wineries.

Heavy rains forced the Salinas river that bisects Paso Robles to swell and flood, causing damage to roadways, homes and businesses, he said. “The river flood stage is 29 feet. We hit 32 feet,” said Stornetta.

The city had to issue forced evacuations earlier in the week. “We’ve conducted three waterway rescues and a helicopter rescue,” he said.

At the Tablas Creek Vineyard, about 15 minutes west of the town of Paso Robles, viticulturist Jordan Lonborg shot a video of Las Tablas Creek as it spilled over its banks and the water gushed past the entrance to the vineyard.

“It got hairy for a bit,” said Lonborg.

“We’ve gotten 6.5 inches of rain over a 24-36 hour period. The ground is saturated and has nowhere to run,” he said. The floodwater washed out a main road leading up to the vineyard. “It’s our primary access to town. So now instead of 20 minutes, it will take 40 minutes to get to town,” he said.

Still, he’s not complaining because rain can be good for the wine business.

“We rely on rain because 40% of the vineyard is dry farmed. So that’s why winter rains are crucial for the plants,” he said. Although rain has fully saturated the ground around the dormant vines, Lonborg said the soil is tightly held together and not in danger of eroding.

“We plan for extreme rains and prep our soil for it,” he said.

But rains and flooding have stalled another crucial aspect of the wine business - tastings. With the main road under water, the vineyard has had to cancel tasting events.

“We rely on tastings for business in the off season,” said Lonborg. “The profit margins are in the direct-to-consumer sales. Some wineries only sell direct to consumer and don’t have online sales. For them, this could be a bigger problem.”

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HEADLINE	01/13 Temp staffing costs strain WA hospitals
SOURCE	<a href="https://crosscut.com/news/2023/01/whole-thing-broken-temp-staffing-costs-strain-wa-hospitals">https://crosscut.com/news/2023/01/whole-thing-broken-temp-staffing-costs-strain-wa-hospitals</a>
GIST	<p>Coming off a recent 12-hour night shift in Grays Harbor County, travel nurse Steven Higgs sleeps for about six hours. Then he tosses his backpack into his 2004 Nissan Sentra and starts the two-and-half-hour drive north along Highway 101 to his home and family in Sequim.</p> <p>Higgs typically spends three nights a week in Aberdeen, where he tends patients in the Harbor Regional Health emergency room, filling shifts contracted through his own small health care staffing agency — <a href="#">North Coast Nomad</a>.</p>

Amid the pandemic's surging demand for health care workers, the longtime nurse said he saw a chance in 2021 to launch a regional, collaborative temporary staffing service that could better serve both workers and shorthanded local hospitals.

"For the last couple of years we were at war, in essence, with something that was killing a lot of people," he said. "And I just wanted to make sure that I was able to help as much as I could for that."

Many small or rural hospitals have had to turn to national temporary staffing agencies to fill their urgent nursing needs, facing a tight market where they compete for workers against much larger facilities in metro areas. Aberdeen's Harbor Regional has completely closed one of its medical/surgical floors over staffing shortages and the mounting costs of temporary workers.

Chief Financial Officer Niall Foley said Harbor Regional has seen its temporary labor expenses balloon by more than 485% since 2019. Financial reports show the hospital's primary staffing contractor — AMN Healthcare, the country's largest such agency — has seen its profits more than triple in that time.

Despite their outsized role in propping up the nation's strained health care system, temporary staffing agencies operate with little direct oversight. Lawmakers and hospital officials nationwide have increasingly called for more transparency from those agencies, passing price caps in some states or requesting investigations into alleged price gouging. Washington officials say they continue to seek more accountability on these services.

Many hospitals have also struggled to balance travel-nurse reinforcements with their regular full-time workers as wage disparities have contributed to [low morale and retention challenges](#). Both [hospitals](#) and health care [unions](#) will propose staffing bills again this legislative session that they argue would ease staffing conflicts.

While Higgs and Foley work on different sides of the staffing dynamic, both agree the situation is unsustainable. And both hope a new model can emerge to ease local hospitals out of a constant state of crisis.

"The travel agencies aren't really causing [the shortage]," Foley said. "It's a necessary industry. Really, we need to focus on getting new nurses, new staff, new doctors into the industry."

### **A 'bill-to-fill' boom**

Health care staffing agencies provide temporary staff, or "travelers," to local hospitals or other medical facilities. They have long played an important role in the health care ecosystem: For example, the typical 13-week contracts cover things like an employee's parental leave, while shorter contracts can cover when employees have unexpected illness or leave.

Staffing agencies take a percentage of the price billed to hospitals. As the prices of and demand for travel staff increase, their financials look better and better. AMN Healthcare is a national, publicly traded company that has the largest market share — about 18% — in the very fragmented market for travel nurses.

An AMN spokesperson declined to answer questions or be interviewed for this article. Crosscut gathered information from AMN's annual and quarterly public [reports](#), press releases and discussions with a Morningstar financial analyst.

Reports show AMN typically [earns](#) a 27% gross profit on "nurse and allied solutions." So if AMN bills the hospital \$100 for a nurse, AMN pays wages and a [range](#) of possible benefits, and then keeps about \$27 for its own overhead and profit. If the "bill-to-fill" rate doubles to \$200, AMN now keeps \$54.

As COVID-19 surged in urban areas, demand for front-line staff outstripped supply, contributing to a surge in the bill-to-fill rate. Then as the pandemic wore on, a national reshuffling of health care staff continued. Some staff nurses left for lucrative travel contracts while front-line workers left the field, some temporarily and others perhaps permanently.

AMN reports that the average number of temporary nursing and allied staff on assignment (excluding physicians and leadership) increased by 65% from September [2019](#) year-to-date to the same period in [2022](#).

That translates to big money for AMN. It reported \$362 million in profit for the first nine months of 2022, significantly higher than in all of 2019.

AMN also runs Medefis, an online staffing marketplace that is free for health care employers. Medefis allows a hospital to access many staffing agencies through a centralized process of recruiting and hiring. It is unclear how the staffing agencies pay to use the platform, also called a “vendor management system” or VMS.

What is clear is that AMN [makes](#) approximately 70% gross profit on this line of business (“technology and workforce solutions”) and says that it takes a “4-5% fee” on the service.

With such growth, temporary staffing agencies have drawn [increased scrutiny](#) in recent years as regulators questioned whether agencies might be engaged in price gouging or anti-competitive behavior.

### **Temp staffing costs**

Meanwhile, Harbor Regional Health, or Grays Harbor Public Hospital District No. 2, simply cannot hire and retain enough nurses, certified nursing assistants, respiratory therapists or other staff. Foley said in October the hospital had seen an increase in non-COVID visits and behavioral health patients forced to wait for beds elsewhere.

HRH received a variety of federal and state pandemic relief grants and loans, including \$13.6 million from the CARES Act. Those federal CARES Act provider relief funds allowed hospitals to pay for unusual expenses related to COVID-19.

With numbers shared by the CFO, Crosscut calculated that in 2021-2022 HRH spent the equivalent of more than half of that \$13.6 million on temporary labor alone.

Harbor Regional fills most of its staffing needs through Medefis, the AMN platform, where Foley said they face a national bidding war.

“Obviously, we’re a small community hospital – we don’t have the same resources as the large health systems,” he said. “If we run out of money, there’s no one to come and bail us out.”

Foley estimates that they will have spent over \$11 million on temporary labor in 2022 — a combination of their need for staff and the agencies’ bill-to-fill rates. Temporary labor hours accounted for 10% of all Harbor Regional labor hours from January-August 2022, an increase from just 2.6% of labor hours in 2019.

Prior to the pandemic, the bill-to-fill rate was roughly comparable to the rate of pay plus benefits for similar local staff, Foley said. A staff nurse might make about \$42 per hour, plus benefits, for a total cost of \$57 an hour. Before the pandemic, the hospital paid on average \$56 an hour for a travel nurse. Staffing agencies typically cover any benefits for travel staff.

Since 2019, the average hourly bill-to-fill rate Harbor Regional paid for travel nurses nearly tripled, reaching \$156.

Foley said the hospital temporarily closed the second floor because of the staffing shortage. They haven’t reopened it because the revenue from patient services would not cover the costs of hiring travel staff.

With fewer beds available to admit emergency patients, the backups have caused staffing strains and longer wait times.

Hospitals can match some volumes to staffing, for example by rescheduling procedures. But they must staff the ER. Harbor Regional does that partly with travel staff from North Coast Nomad.

“There's been a lot of burnout, a lot of long hours,” Foley said. “We've tried to do things to help people out. We've done retention [bonuses], but not everybody just needs an extra few dollars in their pocket — they actually need breaks and time off. And that's been challenging.”

### **Policing ‘price gouging’**

Retired Washington state Rep. Eileen Cody, D-West Seattle, was a practicing nurse herself until a few years ago. She served on the House Health Care and Wellness Committee for 28 years, 24 of those as chair. She said that while staffing agencies have their place, the pandemic highlighted the need to try to regulate them.

“It really was price gouging,” Cody said. “There was a discussion about whether we should try and do a bill. But the problem is, that especially when it's across state lines, you're interfering with interstate commerce. And it's just not easy to figure out how, as a state, to deal with an agency bill.”

A price-gouging [bill](#) that the Washington Attorney General sent to the legislature in 2021 failed. It would have regulated “health care services,” along with other necessities during an emergency.

Still, Brionna Aho, a spokesperson for the Washington Attorney General’s office, wrote that “excessive, unnecessary price increases, not based on increases in cost, can be an unfair or deceptive business practice.” (Someone would have to file a complaint against an agency.)

Chelene Whiteaker, senior vice president of government affairs for the Washington State Hospital Association, said she thinks more transparency is an important first step for this now-huge part of the health care delivery system. According to their survey of Washington’s acute-care hospitals, the number of travelers statewide had grown from fewer than 2,000 before the pandemic to about 8,000 as of June.

No Washington state agency directly regulates the staffing agencies for issues such as basic financial transparency or billing rates. Hospitals, however, must provide a detailed accounting of service rates, patient volumes, staff certifications and other information to government entities.

“We think that it’s time for the traveling agencies to do the same,” Whiteaker said.

Illinois just passed a [law](#) to require some transparency around the rates billed to hospitals and paid to travel staff. And a [bill](#) in the U.S. Congress urges investigation of “the effects of travel nurse agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic,” including business and payment practices, their effects on workforce shortages, and the role of private equity firms.

A few states have [considered](#) or passed caps on how much a staffing agency can bill for nurses and other critical health workers. [Minnesota](#) caps rates for travel staff in nursing homes at 150% the average wage. Foley and Whiteaker worry that rate caps could backfire: If the state has a cap, travel staff may not want to come here and patient needs would go unmet.

### **A local approach**

After six years working in the emergency department at Olympic Medical Center in Port Angeles, Higgs now employs a staff of 17 travel nurses at North Coast Nomad with contracts at three hospitals. He said he recruits local nurses to work at nearby facilities, keeping them rooted in their home communities.

Nursing is already a tough job, he said, without dealing with the resource shortages and politics of a hospital. The culture of most hospitals is that nurses will do anything for their patients, based on their compassion and feelings of duty or service.

“Do it all with nothing,” he said, “build mansions out of twigs and shrubbery.”



Higgs was reluctant to share his story publicly because travel nurses and agencies get negative press — unfairly he thinks. In his experience, North Coast Nomad allows health care workers to continue their passion on their terms.

It isn't just the money that entices people to do travel work, he said. Some want more control over their schedules or different experiences to build their skill set. Some are just tired of hospitals' internal politics.

Travel work allows a type of gig-worker autonomy and detachment. And, if the traveler keeps their housing back home, the pay covers double rent or mortgage. Ultimately, he thinks his business has "allowed us to take pride again in what we're doing."

He said his business is different from the big national staffing agencies in transparency, flexibility and staff quality. North Coast Nomad strives for low overhead and pays out a larger share of its bill-to-fill rate to employees. About 75% goes directly to workers as wages, he said, a percentage he contends is meaningfully higher than that of other agencies working in the region. Several recent job postings for an RN in an Aberdeen emergency room advertise a pay and benefits package equivalent to 61% to 73% of a \$130 bill rate.

"We try to give the best rate possible," he said, "but also if [the hospitals] need staff, we have to attract nurses."

Higgs said he discloses those rates and profit margins with his staff, a policy he says is unique. Other travel staff he has worked alongside told him they had no idea what the bill-to-fill rate is.

(According to Foley and a public records request, North Coast Nomad's bill-to-fill rate for ER nurses was similar to that of another larger staffing agency, about \$125-\$135 an hour in 2021. Favorite Healthcare Staffing, a national agency based in Kansas, was billing \$130 as a "crisis" rate — the market rate Harbor Regional has paid since late 2020.)

Higgs said he aims to have staff more readily available to fill shifts at these isolated hospitals. Because his team is local, North Coast Nomad can fill short-notice, single shifts for hospitals. And hospitals deal directly with him — not a recruiter — as the owner and a practicing nurse.

He also knows the quality of his team first-hand, often working directly alongside them.

"I'm not out just trying to fill a hole," he said, "I'm trying to deliver a good product."

### **Seeking solutions**

As it is, Higgs said some hospitals seem stuck in a cycle of understaffing, high volumes, burnout and more travel staff. And nurses are voting with their tired feet.

Foley said he thinks the congressional bill calling for the GAO to investigate the health care staffing industry could help, particularly around crisis rates. But the shortage of nursing and health care staff is the most important problem in his opinion.

Jayson Dick, director of labor advocacy for the Washington State Nurses Association (WSNA) and a nurse, said there are plenty of nurses licensed in Washington, but "they're not willing to work under these conditions."

He said hospitals throwing money at recruitment is like giving a blood transfusion to a patient whose bleeding hasn't been stopped yet.

Rep. Cody said minimum nurse/patient staffing ratios could bring some nurses back to work because they wouldn't be so burned out. She supported such a [bill](#) for the first time in 2022. The reason, she said, was

that the hospitals weren't "coming up with anything, and this is what the nurses are saying they need." It didn't pass, but nurses' [unions](#) pushed for a similar [bill](#) this session.

Higgs isn't sure about his business in the long term. Hospitals might not need as much from North Coast Nomad if the health system can be fixed.

"As a country, we've done a terrible job of taking care of the medical professionals as a whole, in addition to taking care of the medical system," Higgs said. "So you know, I mean, the whole thing is broken. We're just nurses trying to keep the whole boat afloat."

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HEADLINE	01/13 Young exit Puerto Rico, elderly left behind
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/13/puerto-rico-hurricanes-climate-elderly/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/13/puerto-rico-hurricanes-climate-elderly/</a>
GIST	<p>VEGA ALTA, Puerto Rico — Hector Colón and Ana Serrano fell in love in Brooklyn in the 1950s as both tried to scratch out new lives from less than nothing.</p> <p>They had fled Puerto Rico as young adults for factory jobs that offered working-class wages and the conveniences of big-city life: walkable streets, easy public transit and everything they might need within blocks.</p> <p>But when Serrano's mother fell ill in 2000, Serrano returned to the island to care for her. Her husband soon followed. They took their savings and retired, leaving their support system and inheriting the older woman's home in the coastal town of Vega Alta after she died.</p> <p>That is where they were living when Hurricane Maria damaged the roof. Colón didn't want to bother anyone for help, thinking he could do it himself. But he couldn't. Five years later, the elderly couple was still living under a waterlogged roof until a foundation offered to chip in.</p> <p>"It hurts," Serrano, 86, said. "We have family, but nobody thinks of us. They have their own lives and should live them."</p> <p>As Puerto Rico struggles to recover from a series of brutal natural disasters, the island is aging more rapidly than most places on Earth. More than one in five residents is over 65, making Puerto Rico's share of older adults the 10th highest in the world. That puts the U.S. territory in the same category as countries such as Japan, Italy and Germany — places with strong economic bedrocks that Puerto Rico lacks.</p> <p>But what makes Puerto Rico's demographic patterns so unique is what researchers call "aging by compression," meaning the commonwealth is graying because its working adults are leaving. The share of older Puerto Ricans doubled in less than 20 years while U.S. Census Bureau figures show more than 700,000 residents left in the past decade — accelerated by economic truncation and disaster.</p> <p>That emigration has emptied out the barrios of Puerto Rico, leaving large numbers of senior adults alone to face the ravages of cyclones that are ever more frequent, powerful and variable.</p> <p>"Their children migrated to the United States, and senior citizens were left alone in Puerto Rico. And they are the most vulnerable population right now," said Jessika López Montalvo, a social worker who has watched her caseload shift from mostly children to all older adults.</p> <p>The shift has massive implications for Puerto Rico, which is still struggling to recover from Category 5 Hurricane Maria in 2017 and subsequent earthquakes and political tumult. The main island where the capital, San Juan, is located and two smaller islands with fewer resources need workers to rebuild and stimulate the territory's fragile economy.</p> <p>But most residents will be retirement age in less than a decade, data shows. Poverty is expected to deepen as elderly residents make up a greater share of the population, all the while grappling with unequal access</p>

to federal benefits such as Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid because of Puerto Rico's status as a U.S. territory, experts said. And with physicians and medical specialists leaving in droves, the health-care system is teetering precariously.

"Puerto Rico is experiencing a demographic phenomenon not seen anywhere else before on the planet, and we don't know yet what the consequences will be, not just for older adults, but for everyone on the island," said Amilcar Matos-Moreno, a social epidemiologist. "If nothing changes, the repercussions will be severe in terms of mortality and quality of life."

#### **'We need to rethink everything'**

Hurricane Maria resulted in more than 3,000 deaths — the majority involving people over the age of 60 — after it ravaged Puerto Rico five years ago.

Since then, each subsequent disaster has unveiled another facet of the social safety net's inadequacies as stories about Puerto Rico's elderly living in subhuman conditions become frequent segments of local newscasts and tabloids.

"We have been sounding the alarm for years. It was no secret that this would happen," said Carmen Delia Sánchez, Puerto Rico's special advocate for elderly and retired adults. Her office administers federal funds for critical services through the Older Americans Act. "The government was not preparing or prioritizing this shift. Now, we are a country of old people."

The legislature has strengthened elder abuse laws and protections against workplace age discrimination, offered platitudes in budget documents and, in 2022, set aside millions to house about 4,000 seniors during disaster. But while efforts are perpetually underway, critics say, the government has not revealed any strategic plan to respond to what amounts to a massive reordering of society, according to experts and a review of government documents and reports.

Matos-Moreno, along with a group of researchers, analyzed data showing that nearly half of older Puerto Rican adults have at least one child living in the states or in other countries and that about 30 percent live alone — a worrying statistic.

"We don't know what to expect, because no one in the world has lived this," Matos-Moreno said, adding that about two of every five older Puerto Rico residents live below the poverty line.

Puerto Rico's policymakers have been focused on bringing their government out of economic crisis since 2006. But they are emerging from bankruptcy to create budgets for a population that looks radically different than it did then. Nonetheless, Gov. Pedro Pierluisi's policies, from economic development plans to the relentless pursuit of statehood, do not reflect these changes, said more than a dozen advocates and researchers pushing the government to rethink its focus.

The Center for Investigative Reporting in Puerto Rico found that the local health department failed to implement a federal program that helps governments track and deliver lifesaving services to the neediest before, during and after a disaster.

Some municipalities kept a census of need, but there was little to no communication between the central government and its mayors before Fiona struck to evacuate individuals such as dialysis patients to equipped shelters. The federal database identified more than 40,000 energy-dependent patients in Puerto Rico, but experts say the number is higher.

The central government initially blamed municipalities for the failure, saying local authorities have more information than federal officials on which residents need aid. But CPI's analysis found that the federal database contained far more names and addresses but still went unused.

Though the death toll is much lower from the most recent storm, the Puerto Rico government is in no better position to prevent death in another prolonged power outage that could threaten the lives of its elderly population, according to data and experts.

The Puerto Rico departments of health and family affairs did not respond to phone calls and messages.

At the federal level, congressionally imposed caps on Medicare and Medicaid in Puerto Rico, which are funded at lower rates than in the states, also put seniors at a huge disadvantage.

“The health-care system here is so fragmented over the struggle for federal funding that people don’t know how to navigate it, and they fall between the cracks,” said José Acarón, AARP’s Puerto Rico director. “We need to rethink everything in this country to face the reality.”

Sánchez, the government’s special advocate, said she used her limited budget and worked with AARP to provide generators and kitchen equipment to more than 130 private and municipal-run senior housing and community centers ahead of hurricane season. But just 2 percent of Puerto Rico’s elderly and older adults live in such facilities.

The majority are aging inside their own homes in urban areas near San Juan that have not adapted to changing climate and health needs, experts said. After Fiona, seniors found themselves trapped and in need of rescue from high-rise public housing condominiums where elevators were useless in a power outage. Elderly couples abandoned by family or unknown to neighbors went hungry inside overheated and damaged homes. Octogenarians burned to death or died of carbon monoxide poisoning while trying to operate generators.

But while the outlook is grim, researchers say, there is also evidence that the high levels of social cohesion in Puerto Rico’s more rural communities could offer solutions for policymakers. In the wake of tropical cyclones, older adults took charge of their communities. They volunteered to care for and provide for elderly and bedridden neighbors. They coordinated with local governments and nonprofits to meet needs. And they stood up to demand more when they needed it.

#### **‘Puerto Rico is not made for the old’**

A tower of adult diapers and chocolate Ensure beverages sit on tables on one side of a storage room of the Asociación Comunitaria de Llanos Tuna, a local organization serving 6,000 people in western Puerto Rico, while a donated wheelchair and boxes of gauze sit on the other.

Volunteer Annette Menay was busy taking inventory in October in a book whose pages are filled with requests and donations after Hurricane Fiona left their community without electricity and water for three weeks.

Their latest need: Baby food to feed elderly, bedridden residents. Nearly four of every five residents of this rural Cabo Rojo community on Puerto Rico’s southwestern tip is over the age of 65, local leaders say. When disaster strikes, the volunteers, most of whom are retired older adults and cancer patients, fill the gaps.

Mayris Ruiz Olmo, who leads the association, was hired by the municipal government to assess the damage household by household and to build a list of needs after the deadly 2017 storm to access federal relief funds. But what she found was a community of senior citizens who needed much more than pallets of bottled water or mosquito nets. They couldn’t access basic services.

“We needed to go much further than handing them a flier with FEMA’s number,” Ruiz Olmo said. “I gave municipal leaders the census, but when the administration changed parties, all that was lost. Many things could’ve been done that weren’t done. If they had, we wouldn’t be where we are today.”

In the five years since Hurricane Maria, Ruiz Olmo's group has partnered with other nongovernmental organizations to help her neighbors navigate government health insurance, teach people how to use water filters and seal their leaky roofs. But the needs keep growing.

On an October afternoon, an older neighbor with mud-caked jeans showed up to the association's door. It had been raining, and the local creek was flooding. There was no electricity, and he was hungry. Ruiz Olmo directed two volunteers in hairnets, who spooned globs of rice and beans into a Styrofoam container with a pork chop.

"Is there anyone else around you who needs food, too?" she asked the bashful man. He demurred but then said he has some elderly neighbors who haven't eaten in some time.

Ruiz Olmo handed him four more plates of food: "Things simply do not work here in Puerto Rico."

After the storm, she and her motley crew of ladies found a wheelchair-bound amputee suffering from open-wound infections his wife couldn't clean well because there was no water. They located an older gentleman suffering from depression who slept in his vehicle as gusts lashed it. They came across the homes of elderly whose blue tarp roofs affixed after Maria had been torn off by Fiona.

On the other side of the big island, the story is the same. Carlos Rodríguez of the nonprofit Happy Givers came home to Puerto Rico after Maria. He decided to stay, leaving behind a career as a Christian pastor in the states to serve communities near Vega Baja in northeastern Puerto Rico. He had expected most of their work would involve helping children in poverty. But he was wrong.

If Hurricane Maria unmasked Puerto Rico's poverty, Fiona exposed the neglect. Nearly half of seniors are in poverty or on a fixed income, surviving on a Social Security check or food benefits.

Rodríguez, like many of his generation, left Puerto Rico to study and build careers in the states, where a professional can make triple the salary they can at home. When he returned, he said, he was stunned to find so many hungry seniors needing repairs to their homes and help with daily tasks.

"Moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas and uncles are all staying behind, and they're not being supported. And of course, we can't count on the government to support them because they're not," Rodríguez said. "Of the 20 calls we get a day, 19 are from elderly people. They ask, 'Can you come help me? My roof is collapsing. I don't have any water. I can't cook for myself.' We're seeing the regression of all services, electrical services, water services, medical services, and we're seeing it through the eyes of the elderly, who are the most vulnerable population."

But what is less visible is the toll that social isolation — worsened by the pandemic — is having on the mental health of Puerto Rico's abuelos.

Colón and Serrano are the original bootstrappers — a generation of poor Puerto Ricans lured from its balmy shores to big-city factories during one of the largest migrations in history. Their ride on the "guagua aerea," as Puerto Ricans referred to the flights to New York City in the middle of the 20th century, was made necessary by the island's rapid industrialization, which created jobs but displaced thousands of agrarian workers.

He toiled in plastics. She sewed clothes.

When they returned to Puerto Rico decades later, they found themselves underequipped to handle a major storm, resigning themselves to fate as Hurricane Maria's ferocious winds barreled down.

"We sat here holding each other's hands as it passed," Serrano recalled. "I told Hector if the storm takes us, let it take us together."

	<p>Colón had spent a lifetime being resourceful and making things work. He told few people about the damage to their home's roof, hoping he'd find a way to resolve it. The couple grew isolated as time went on. Serrano stopped going to the doctor. She was depressed and ate little. And Colón, now 82, wouldn't eat unless she did. They entertained themselves with crossword puzzles and games on a tablet they could never figure out how to connect to the internet.</p> <p>"I sit here sometimes with tears streaking down my face just remembering," she said.</p> <p>The pair rarely left the home until Happy Foundation volunteers found them living beneath a rotting roof that had corroded the home's electrical system. They were wasting away, shrinking into the furniture as they lost weight and lost will.</p> <p>"The day something happens to us, the neighbor can bury us or leave us pickled in vinegar for all I care," Serrano said with a wicked laugh. The volunteers now visit regularly, bringing them hot meals and helping around the house.</p> <p>The roof was fixed two weeks before Hurricane Fiona dropped more than 20 inches of rain.</p> <p>"I regret having ever left Brooklyn," Serrano said. "Puerto Rico is not made for the old."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Russia tries to ruin city Ukraine liberated</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/14/kherson-destroyed-russia-ukraine-liberated/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/14/kherson-destroyed-russia-ukraine-liberated/</a>
GIST	<p>KHERSON, Ukraine — Four charred baby cribs were all that was left in the maternity ward's bomb shelter.</p> <p>The rest of the room was destroyed Wednesday when Russian forces attacked the city, striking one of the only hospitals in Kherson where babies can still be delivered.</p> <p>By fate or luck, many staff, accustomed to near-constant shelling, chose to hide in a nearby corridor rather than run to the place actually meant to keep them safe — a decision that probably saved them.</p> <p>"Look at our safety now," Oksana Tomchenko, 58, a gynecologist who is the hospital's interim head doctor, said as she gestured to the scorched basement.</p> <p>Residents who survived nine months of Russian occupation say that now that their city is back under Ukrainian control, they face a painful reality: If Russia can no longer have the city, it seems hellbent on destroying it.</p> <p>The strike on Tomchenko's hospital marked at least the fifth time Russian forces have hit a medical facility in Kherson city since early December.</p> <p>One attack hit a different maternity ward just 20 minutes after a baby was born, and this week, another struck the city's children's hospital. Russian forces are also shelling other civilian infrastructure. In recent weeks, they hit a market, a museum and many homes. Dozens of people were killed and more than 150 wounded.</p> <p>"They're just trying to ruin the city," Tomchenko said.</p> <p>In some recently liberated areas, Russian forces were pushed so far out that they could no longer easily attack the territory they'd lost. But when Ukrainian forces reclaimed Kherson on Nov. 11, the Russians retreated just across the Dnieper River, in easy shelling range of the city, which is the capital of a region that Moscow claims to have annexed.</p>



The purported annexation is illegal, and a fantasy given Russia's lack of military or political control. But it means Russian forces are bombing and killing people who President Vladimir Putin insists are now Russian citizens — putting the lie to his claim that the invasion was meant to protect them.

The Russian Defense Ministry has said little about Kherson since the retreat of its forces. Asked about the lack of control in regions Russia says it has annexed, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has repeatedly acknowledged that the situation in some areas is "difficult" but said these regions are now part of Russia and must be liberated. Peskov said Thursday that Russia's war aims have not changed.

Valentyn Ivchenko, 79, has a new nickname for the once peaceful street where he lives near the river: the "Road of Death."

The road is so constantly shelled, Ivchenko said, that "no one drives there anymore." But on Dec. 21, it seemed quiet. He went outside on foot to buy candles and bread. Then he heard the whistle of an incoming shell. He tried to hide in a bus-stop shelter, but his right arm was exposed.

Shrapnel struck him, severely wounding his arm. Weeks later, the retired sailor is still recovering in the hospital. When asked if this was how he imagined life after occupation, he laughed. "Is it over?" he said sarcastically. The Russians are still within view of his home. He said he fears for his life more now than before: "Every day we think: 'Will we survive?'"

In the bed across from him, Viktor Zubenko, 69, sat with his right hand bandaged up. In late November, he had crossed his road to help a neighbor park his car. Then a shell hit. "How can you know when it's going to come?" he said of the attacks. "They're shelling all the time."

Both men are recovering in one of the hospital complexes that were themselves recently shelled.

One trauma doctor, whom The Washington Post is not identifying because he is from Crimea and his parents still live there under Russian occupation, said he is sleeping at the hospital to avoid returning to his eighth-floor apartment in town. The doctor goes back once a week to make sure it is still standing.

On Dec. 24, when Russian forces struck a central market in Kherson, he assisted doctors at a nearby hospital where the mostly severely wounded were taken. Even the dead were delivered to the hospital, he said.

After that day, he noticed that more and more people were leaving Kherson. "They're afraid for their lives," the trauma doctor said. "When the Ukrainian army came in, we had three to four days of euphoria. And then we realized it wasn't over."

The mood in the city is somber. Thousands of residents evacuated in December alone, taking trains that had just recently carried hopeful residents back to the liberated city. The central square where residents joyfully celebrated the Ukrainian military's advance is now largely empty. A few cafes are open, but most businesses are boarded up.

Antonina Popova, 30, recently returned to Kherson from Kyiv to reunite with her parents and sister after a long separation. "But our holiday was spent in the corridor hugging each other because there was so much shelling," she said from a cafe where she was taking advantage of free internet to work remotely Thursday.

The day before, she had been sitting at the same cafe when the maternity ward was struck nearby. A soldier walked her home through the nearly deserted streets.

Zinayida Omeliyanivna, 74, stood shivering Thursday in an outdoor market where she sells bird food, close to the shopping area that was hit last month, killing 10 people.

"Yesterday was very scary, the shelling was very loud," she said. "We wanted liberation. What came out of it, we don't have any control over."

Ivan Frolov, 35, who has a small food stand in the same market, said he opened after liberation but “business has been bad.”

“Everyone’s left. More than half the city is gone,” he said. Now he, too, is thinking of leaving.

An 84-year-old man named Yura waited in line at a nearby pharmacy. That the pharmacy was even open was a good sign to him. “When they’re really shelling, they close the pharmacy,” he said. “Everyone runs.”

Despite the risk, Nastya Smotrova, 22, and her husband, Anton Smotrov, 26, are choosing to stay. Smotrova is 27 weeks pregnant and plans to give birth in the nearby city of Mykolaiv, where it is safer. She thinks Russian forces want to destroy Kherson; her husband believes they want to retake it.

Ivchenko, who was recently wounded, is Smotrova’s grandfather. Her mother lives in the same building as he does on the “Road of Death” by the river. Their house is the only one left standing, she said.

Her mother regularly dodges shells as she walks to a bus stop to ride to work at the same market that was recently hit in town. “They want to annihilate everything,” Smotrova said of the Russians.

Kateryna Ponomaryova, 29, and her husband, Maksym Ponomaryov, 30, had their first baby under Russian occupation — in a hospital that also has now been shelled. On Thursday, exhausted from the constant booms and worried over lack of work in the empty city, the family packed their bags and went to the train station to leave.

“We didn’t expect this,” Ponomaryova said of the string of attacks that have made life miserable. The couple still hope to return with their baby when the situation stabilizes. For now, she said, the Russians “just want revenge.”

Lyuba Hloba, 25, was also leaving Kherson, with her 5-year-old daughter, Anna. Just days before, a Russian shell had landed between their home and their neighbor’s, carving a two-meter-wide hole into the ground.

“I want her to have more peace and quiet,” Hloba said of her little girl.

When Russian forces struck the maternity ward Wednesday, the building filled with smoke. The windows exploded, except — somehow — in the room where a young mother was recovering from a Caesarean section with her day-old daughter.

Normally, the woman should have stayed longer to recover. But Tomchenko, the gynecologist, released her early, believing she might be safer at home.

Tomchenko replaced the hospital director after he fled to Russian-occupied territory ahead of the Ukrainian advance in November. She called him after Wednesday’s attack. “He told me not to cry,” she said.

Tomchenko’s cousin, who lives in Russia, has pushed back against her account of the reality in Kherson — repeating Kremlin propaganda that Russian forces invaded to liberate Ukrainians from “Nazis.”

After Wednesday’s attack, Tomchenko sent her a message on Telegram: “This shelling happened in my maternity ward. Where the hell did you find Nazis here?” she wrote. Her cousin responded with a link to a Russian news site claiming Ukrainian forces had faked the strike.

Tomchenko had had enough. She blocked her cousin’s number — and got back to work.

HEADLINE	01/13 Yearly wage gain lags behind inflation again
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/workers-lose-ground-to-inflation-despite-big-wage-gains-11673649460?mod=hp_lead_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/workers-lose-ground-to-inflation-despite-big-wage-gains-11673649460?mod=hp_lead_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>Worker pay increases fell behind inflation in 2022 for the second year in a row, leaving households worse off despite historically <a href="#">strong pay gains</a>.</p> <p>But recent data suggest a shift is under way, with paycheck totals gaining ground as <a href="#">inflation eases</a>. Whether the trend continues in 2023 depends on the path of the economy, which is cooling as the Federal Reserve <a href="#">raises interest rates</a> and faces <a href="#">the risk of a recession</a>.</p> <p>A <a href="#">historically tight labor market</a> pushed up average hourly earnings by 4.6% in December from a year earlier, the Labor Department said this week, compared with a 6.5% annual inflation rate in the same period. Likewise, average hourly earnings rose 4.9% in December 2021 from a year earlier, compared with a 7% annual inflation rate.</p> <p>The result: Worker pay actually fell the past two years after accounting for inflation. Inflation-adjusted average hourly earnings—or real earnings—were down 1.7% in December 2022 from a year earlier, following a 2.1% decline in December 2021.</p> <p>In the long run, wage increases tend to move alongside inflation, economists say. But at times of economic upheaval, such as during the pandemic, the gap between the two can widen.</p> <p>During the past two years, supply-chain disruptions related to the pandemic and higher energy costs linked to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine caused inflation to outpace wage gains. The effect of these supply factors is now fading, putting less pressure on consumer prices.</p> <p>Both pay increases and inflation have been cooling since the middle of last year. But for the past two months inflation has been easing more than wages, giving paychecks a boost.</p> <p>As a result, this could be the year that workers start seeing real wage gains again.</p> <p>“The question for 2023 is which moderates faster: inflation or wages,” said Nela Richardson, chief economist at <a href="#">ADP</a>, a payroll processor.</p> <p>Ordinarily, if paychecks aren’t keeping up with inflation, households would be forced to cut back on spending, which could send the economy into a downturn.</p> <p>In this case, households benefited from huge amounts of pent-up savings, thanks to multiple rounds of federal stimulus and reduced spending during the early months of the pandemic. Families tapped into those savings last year to keep up their consumption.</p> <p>Inflation-adjusted consumer spending either rose or held level every month of last year through November, according to the latest data available, indicating that consumers have yet to pull back.</p> <p>Amy Hekman, of Grand Rapids, Mich., lost her job at an early-childhood nonprofit early in the pandemic. But higher unemployment insurance payments included in 2020 pandemic stimulus kept her afloat, she said.</p> <p>Her rent has gone up 30% over three years, “not including groceries, gas and all those other things that have increased as well,” she said, prompting her to think about a new, more lucrative career.</p> <p>In 2021, she started taking on temporary work assignments in human resources, looking to make a career change. Now she is interviewing for full-time human-resources jobs that could allow her to better absorb higher prices.</p> <p>“I am only looking for positions that would put me ahead,” she said.</p>

In recent months, the savings cushion that Americans have built up has been slowly shrinking. Fed researchers estimated the total amount of excess savings fell to \$1.7 trillion midway through 2022, from \$2.3 trillion in the third quarter of 2021.

“As of now, the consumer is still holding up,” said Ms. Richardson. “This is really a race against the clock to restore inflation to more tolerable levels and then let the job market do what it does, which in a tight labor market is keep wages robust. That’s hopefully what happens this year.”

Fed officials have been worried that rising wages and high inflation could feed off each other, causing a spiral. So far, that hasn’t happened. Officials have said they want to see wage increases ease, which could take some pressure off inflation.

“It’s not that we don’t want wage increases,” Fed Chair Jerome Powell said this past month. “We want strong wage increases. We just want them to be at a level that’s consistent with 2% inflation.”

Right now, he added, wage gains are “well above” that level.

Wages tend to be “stickier” than inflation, said Credit Suisse economist Jeremy Schwartz. They don’t rise and fall as rapidly as consumer prices. That means wage gains could exceed inflation for a little while until they come back into rough alignment, he said.

Mr. Schwartz sees year-over-year wage increases falling to just above 4% by the end of 2023, while inflation weakens to around 3% on the year.

“In terms of not seeing such painful price increases and having your income stretch further, this could be a pretty good year for consumers,” he said.

Despite the possible return of real wage gains, workers could suffer if the economy tips into recession this year, as many economists expect. A recession would likely lead to layoffs and push up the unemployment rate from December’s 3.5%. Fed officials see the unemployment rate rising to 4.6% by the end of the year.

“If you retain a job you’ll be in better shape,” said Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at Nationwide. “It’s just that there’s going to be an increased risk of layoffs for this year.”

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HEADLINE	01/14 Day 325 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-325-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-325-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The United Nations’ nuclear watchdog announced it would boost its presence in Ukraine</b> to help prevent a nuclear accident during the conflict. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it would soon have a permanent presence at all five of Ukraine’s nuclear facilities. Currently, only the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia plant, which is near the frontline, has a permanent IAEA presence.</li><li>• <b>Ukraine has denied Russia’s claim that Putin’s forces have captured Soledar.</b> On Friday, Russia’s defence ministry said its forces had taken full control of the salt mining town. Ukrainian officials denied the Russian claim, suggesting they were still holding on and counterattacking, with the Ukrainian military spokesperson Serhii Cherevatyi reporting “ongoing battles”.</li><li>• <b>Soledar is ‘Verdun for 21st century’ according to a top Ukraine official.</b> Andriy Yermak, head of the office of the president of Ukraine, likened the fight for the town to the longest and bloodiest battle in the first world war.</li><li>• <b>Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said on Thursday that Ukrainian forces defending Bakhmut and Soledar in the east would be armed with everything they need to keep Russian troops at bay in some of the bloodiest fighting of the war.</b></li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hundreds of civilians remain trapped in Soledar, Ukraine has said.</b> Pavlo Kyrylenko, the governor of Donetsk, told Ukrainian state TV that 559 civilians remained in Soledar, <a href="#">including 15 children</a>, and could not be evacuated.</li> <li>• <b>Satellite images taken by Maxar Technologies show the destruction inflicted upon Soledar.</b> The Guardian has <a href="#">a series of striking images</a> from inside the eastern Ukrainian town.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine is confident Britain will announce it plans to send about 10 Challenger 2 tanks to Kyiv shortly</b>, a move it hopes will help Germany finally allow its Leopard 2s to be re-exported to the embattled country. A formal announcement is anticipated on Monday but Ukrainian sources indicated they understood that Britain had already decided in favour.</li> <li>• <b>Germany will continue to “weigh every step carefully” and consult with its allies on further weapons deliveries to Ukraine, chancellor Olaf Scholz has said.</b> The German leader is facing mounting pressure to approve German-made battle tanks for Kyiv. Scholz said Berlin would keep its “leading position” as one of Kyiv’s top supporters but said he had no intention of being rushed on “such serious things that have to do with peace and war, with the security of our country and of Europe”.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 China: past 5 weeks 60,000 died from Covid</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/nearly-60000-people-have-died-of-covid-in-china-in-past-five-weeks">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/nearly-60000-people-have-died-of-covid-in-china-in-past-five-weeks</a>
GIST	<p>Almost 60,000 people have died of Covid in <a href="#">China</a> in the past five weeks, authorities have announced.</p> <p>China is in the grip of a major wave of the virus after <a href="#">abruptly lifting its zero-Covid policy restrictions</a> in December, with some major cities estimating between 70% and 90% of their populations have been infected.</p> <p>Anecdotal reports and long queues at morgues and crematoriums point to a high death toll but until Saturday, authorities had only officially recorded a few dozen Covid-19 deaths.</p> <p>The shortfall was due to stringent definitions of how a death is attributed to Covid. Only people who died of respiratory failure were counted. The <a href="#">World Health Organization last week criticised the new definition</a> as too narrow and an under-representation of the true impact of the outbreak. Chinese authorities responded that it was not necessary to attribute every death.</p> <p>On Saturday, however, Jiao Yahui, the head of the Bureau of Medical Administration, announced there had in fact been 59,938 Covid deaths between 8 December and 12 January. It included about 5,500 who died of respiratory failure, while the rest also had underlying health conditions. The average age of those who died was 80, Jiao said, with 90.1% aged 65 and above.</p> <p>The death toll given on Saturday includes only those who died in hospital and is likely still lower than the true total.</p> <p>There have been concerns about further spread of the virus ahead of the lunar new year holiday beginning next week. People had been urged not to visit their elderly relatives in order to protect them.</p> <p>Jiao said case rates were declining and the peak had passed in most areas. She said the daily number of people going to fever clinics peaked at 2.9 million on 23 December and had fallen by 83% to 477,000 on Thursday.</p> <p>“These data show the national emergency peak has passed,” she said.</p> <p>China’s government had been under criticism from other governments and the WHO over its lack of data transparency. It stopped publishing most infection data since the sharp rise began. Several nations have enacted travel restrictions or mandatory testing on incoming travellers from China, prompting some retaliatory measures from Beijing against incoming travellers from Japan and South Korea.</p>

HEADLINE	01/13 Incoming epic arsenal Western weapons?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thedailybeast.com/vladimir-putin-faces-this-new-arsenal-of-us-european-weapons-in-2023?ref=home">https://www.thedailybeast.com/vladimir-putin-faces-this-new-arsenal-of-us-european-weapons-in-2023?ref=home</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">The war that Vladimir Putin</a> thought he would win in a matter of days is still raging after nearly a year, with both sides desperately seeking more equipment, soldiers, and international support. But Russia, it seems, may soon be in for a knock-out blow—courtesy of <a href="#">Ukraine's friends in the U.S.</a> and Europe.</p> <p>Last week, Washington <a href="#">announced</a> a new \$3.8 billion arms package to Ukraine that included everything from sorely needed air defense systems to artillery shells. Most of Ukraine's excitement, though, was reserved for the inclusion of the Bradley fighting vehicle, a capable armored vehicle that <a href="#">Ukraine has long sought</a> to help reclaim land seized by <a href="#">Russia</a>. The decision to finally send Bradleys signals that even more sophisticated weapons systems, including tanks, might be just over the horizon.</p> <p>The line of what systems are “too escalatory” to send to Ukraine has constantly been moving in Ukraine's favor, with weapons thought to be too escalatory at the start of the war now either on their way or on the table. The U.S. and other countries have sent artillery to Ukraine throughout the conflict, but non-Soviet tanks and infantry fighting vehicles—IFVs for short—were an informal red line until just recently.</p> <p>It's not just the U.S. that's changing its mind about what's appropriate to send. Over the past few weeks, Germany <a href="#">promised</a> to send 40 Marder infantry fighting vehicles. German and American IFVs are in various states of modernization, but they will still make a big difference, as both Russia and Ukraine are currently using a mishmash of IFVs that include much older equivalents.</p> <p>The biggest question is the provision of modern American and European tanks. Eastern European countries like Poland and Czechia have delivered hundreds of Soviet-era tanks to Ukraine throughout the war. The Ukrainians have made good use of donated tanks, but have consistently asked for the more modern tanks made by the U.S., Germany, and others.</p> <p>Though Europe has been reticent about sending tanks, the tide might be turning, with both the German-made Leopard 2 and the British-made Challenger 2 on the table. France already promised the <a href="#">AMX-10RC</a>, which is more comparable to a tank destroyer, but has fallen short of promising its own main battle tank, the Leclerc.</p> <p>The Leopard 2 is considered the most viable candidate among western tanks. Even if <a href="#">Germany itself</a> doesn't send any, other European countries from Spain to Finland can field them, and countries that can't spare Leopards can still send spare parts.</p> <p>Though the German government has the authority to restrict owners of German-made tanks from transferring them to Ukraine, the country is now under much stronger pressure to allow other countries to transfer Leopards.</p> <p>On Jan. 10, <i>Politico</i> <a href="#">reported</a> that France was pressuring Berlin to send tanks, and a day later, the president of Poland <a href="#">announced</a> that some of their Leopard 2s would be sent to Ukraine—without clarifying if Germany would allow it. If Berlin does eventually agree to send tanks or allow other nations to re-export them, they will likely announce it around the Franco-German summit later this month.</p> <p>The U.K. is also reportedly <a href="#">planning</a> to send tanks, but would be limited in how many they could reasonably send as the size of their tank fleet <a href="#">dwindled</a> over the past few years, leaving the British army with few to spare.</p> <p>Beyond new donations, key equipment promised in 2022 is set to arrive in 2023. The most notable of these are air defense systems. In December, the U.S. <a href="#">promised</a> a PATRIOT missile battery and France secured the export of the SAMP/T, both of which will likely be deployed in the next few months once crews are</p>



trained. The L3 VAMPIRE, a [smaller](#) system designed to shoot down drones at a fraction of the cost of more sophisticated systems, is also set to arrive in the coming months.

While Ukraine looks forward to more weapons, Russia is looking for more men. Ukraine claims that Russia will try to [mobilize](#) 500,000 reservists to support new offensives against Ukraine in the coming year. If Ukraine is correct, the new forces would add to the 300,000 [reservists](#) Putin called up last fall. Mobilizing that many reservists will be chaotic—but the influx of troops will make it harder for Ukraine to regain more territory.

Russia does not have international donors like Ukraine, but Moscow’s growing partnership with Iran will likely grow through 2023. Iran already [supplied](#) Russia with drones used to attack Ukraine’s infrastructure, but many of the drones and missiles rumored to appear have not yet been seen on the battlefield. Some commentators [argue](#) that Iran is waiting until October, when a UN resolution related to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal—which would trigger sanctions if Iran supplies long-range missiles—expires.

Iran has much more to offer Russia than missiles and drones. The country has been under international sanctions for some time and is more adept at dodging international restrictions. Tehran will not only be able to [help](#) Russia with oil smuggling to finance the war, but may be able to assist Russia in acquiring Western-made [components](#) for its missiles and drones. The U.S. stepped up [sanctions](#) on Iran over its weapons transfers this month, but stopping the supply of components altogether will be difficult.

With so many possibilities for weapons transfers, it’s difficult to tell how 2023 will shape up for Ukraine. Russia’s willingness to call up hundreds of thousands of new soldiers and leverage their relationship with countries like Iran will improve their ability to keep up the fight. On the other hand, if the U.S. and European support grows in size and scope, Ukraine’s commanders will find themselves at the head of an even more lethal fighting force.

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HEADLINE	01/13 Trailblazing Seattle area female firefighters
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/life/firefighters-honor-lineage-of-trailblazing-women-in-seattle-area-firehouses/">https://www.seattletimes.com/life/firefighters-honor-lineage-of-trailblazing-women-in-seattle-area-firehouses/</a>
GIST	<p>Much of the female firefighting experience has changed since the first woman joined the Seattle Fire Department nearly 50 years ago. More than a handful of women work in the department now, and they can drive fire engines and wear their hair past their ears.</p> <p>But much of what made recruiting and retaining women difficult in the first place — increased scrutiny of physical ability and job performance standards, implicit biases, the experience of being the only woman in the room — remains the same for women in fire departments across the Puget Sound region.</p> <p>These female firefighters carry on a tradition of trailblazing women, Seattle-area first responders who endure persisting systemic challenges, like a lack of female representation in leadership — in addition to the regular stress of a high-intensity job.</p> <p><b>Who becomes a firefighter</b></p> <p>Women who do this work love firefighting: It’s an active, ever-changing job reliant on teamwork, collaboration and empathy. Historically, fire departments emphasized physical strength above everything else. But SFD data shows <a href="#">around 75% of the calls firefighters respond to</a> are medical emergencies that require critical thinking and tact above strength.</p> <p>“There is a bar above which people need to be physically strong [to be firefighters] and that is a bar many more women could hurdle,” said Dr. Corinne Bendersky, professor of management and organizations at UCLA’s Anderson School of Management. This overreliance on strength has historically limited who becomes a firefighter.</p> <p>Bendersky’s research centers on women in male-dominated spaces. For the past decade, she’s researched the fire service.</p>

“At a subconscious level, when people think of firefighters, they always think of men,” Bendersky said. “There are so few women in the fire service to start with because it’s not on their radar screen,” Bendersky said.

This was especially true back when the first women joined the Seattle Fire Department in the 1970s. From Bonnie Beers, who cracked this glass ceiling, to the brave community servants of today, female firefighters face similar obstacles, but continue to pave a path for future generations.

### **Bonnie Beers paved the way**

Bonnie Beers, now 68, became the first female firefighter in SFD history when she responded to the recruitment ad SFD sent her brother in the late 1970s. The ad encouraged women to apply, so Beers did.

“I assumed there were women,” Beers said. She was a teen at the time, and “naive.” There weren’t any women in the department.

“I came in ’77,” Beers said. “There was another recruitment class after mine and they flunked all the women out of that class. I think it was because they didn’t want women.”

Fire departments, Bendersky explained, are traditional organizations largely resistant to change.

Bendersky cited how, in Los Angeles County, the fire department introduced a [halyard](#) to make putting up longer ladders and less physically strenuous. Firefighters complained. “It was widely shared with me as an example of the department lowering standards to allow more women,” she said.

In her first year in the fire service, Beers worked at a slow station. Fewer emergency calls meant more time for teasing and scrutiny, and fewer opportunities to prove herself. Once she moved to a more active station downtown, Beers established herself as capable. In her career, Beers kept establishing herself again and again.

“You get tired of being at your best every time you show up at everything,” Beers said.

Over a year went by before another woman joined the department, Beers said. So Beers helped design a pre-recruitment training class for women.

“Three women passed the next year,” Beers said. “Because I recommended it, they ended up on busy engine companies.”

Beers spent 10 years in SFD before she worked with another woman. Even then, Beers said, firemen thought women working together “were going to burn down the place.”

Even when she became battalion chief, Beers, who emphasized collaborative decision-making, felt conscious of public challenges.

“I tried to instill in them, ‘You can question what I do, but don’t do it on the radio in a way where I look bad,’” she said.

As the only female battalion chief, everyone knew her voice.

### **Carrying the firefighting torch**

When Sue Stangl, now an SFD lieutenant, applied to the department in 1990, she had no illusions of being accepted — she’d never heard of female firefighters.

Before her first day, Stangl was scared. “I decided to go knock on the door of the nearest fire station and ask those guys what they thought about a woman being hired,” Stangl said. A female firefighter opened the door. “I gave her a look like, ‘What are you doing here?’”

Seeing and talking to a firewoman made Stangl believe she could do the job. Then she got her first assignment.

“The men laughed when they looked at who was on my crew,” Stangl said. “[Department leadership] said, ‘This is the last standing old boy’s club and we want you to break it up.’”

At 26, Stangl spent over a year working alongside men in their 40s or older, many of whom had never worked with a woman before.

Stangl’s next assignment transferred her to the same fire station she’d visited before her first day. She worked alongside the same female firefighter.

Stangl relaxed; a woman had “blazed the trail” at this station. Not only that, but she and Stangl chatted together and they could “rejuvenate.” This wasn’t the norm. For much of her career, Stangl “felt I was wearing the entire image of women in the fire service on my back.”

The first time Stangl worked on an all-woman crew — after about 30 years of service — was 2021, on her birthday.

“It’s how men experience the fire department every day,” she said. “It was incredible.”

The department has come far in Stangl’s time. In 2015, when the [Ride the Ducks boat crashed on Aurora Avenue North](#), the incident commander and operations chief at SFD who handled the response were both women.

“I felt pride to see everybody working in unison for such a horrific incident and with all women in incident control positions,” Stangl said. “The epiphany was that no one cared.”

### **A historic shift**

Before she joined the Kirkland Fire Department six years ago, Keelin Pattillo played professional soccer for the OL Reign. At the height of her career, Pattillo made the maximum National Women’s Soccer League annual salary at the time: \$30,000. Living in Seattle and looking to buy a house and start a family with her partner wouldn’t be possible if she kept playing soccer.

But Pattillo found firefighting — the ultimate team sport, Pattillo explained. It hit all of her boxes for a career: active, not in an office, a different problem to solve every day. Firefighting was a more secure career than pro sports.

However, Pattillo experienced culture shock when she joined.

“I came from being surrounded by a bunch of women who were like me [on the soccer team] to the very male-dominated fire service,” Pattillo said.

Out of the 33 people on her shift at KFD, Pattillo is the only woman. Just 5.5% of KFD firefighters are women, the department said. While firefighting has given Pattillo more confidence in her own strength and abilities, she constantly feels like “everybody’s looking at me.”

Female firefighters “work under a microscope, constantly having to prove themselves in some cases at a clearly higher standard than their male counterparts,” Bendersky said.

Pattillo’s co-worker, Megan Keyes, worked in KFD for about eight years before working with another woman full time.

“I got to work with Keelin on the same crew for about a year,” Keyes said, “and that’s kind of when it started to click like, ‘Oh, this is refreshing, this feels like a break that I didn’t know I needed.’”

In August, Pattillo, Keyes and Sabi Avcu, three of the seven women who work at KFD, were all assigned a shift on the same unit. [That had never happened before](#) in department history.

“It felt special to be working with a crew of all women, but it was also incredibly ordinary — we came to work and did our jobs,” Pattillo said.

### **Working the ladder**

Cora McManus is one of the three women working ladder trucks in SFD. She’s the only Black woman in the role; there are three Black women in all of SFD.

McManus, who debated playing professional women’s basketball before opting for firefighting, takes pride in her strength and ability. Ladder trucks are extremely physical. McManus throws ladders, extricates people from car crashes, breaks down doors and conducts search-and-rescue operations.

Realistically, with few women, especially Black women, in SFD, McManus is going to be different, she said.

“When I go into work in the morning, I just have to make sure we can go into a burning building together and get the job done,” McManus said. “We don’t have to be friends, we don’t have to have voted for the same president, we just have to get the job done.”

McManus said it’s still rare to work with other women.

“It’s pretty funny sometimes,” McManus said. “If there are two women at a station, sometimes talking at the table, it can make guys uncomfortable because they don’t know what we’re talking about.”

That generation of men is “on their way out,” McManus said, and “things are getting better,” but she remembered earlier in her five years at SFD, “being like, ‘Are [women] not supposed to talk to each other?’”

That was as recently as 2017.

For McManus, having a diverse crew means approaching problems differently and more effectively.

Diversity also makes it easier interfacing with the public, many of whom only interact with the fire service in times of crisis.

“If we’re helping an individual and we have a team of people who don’t all look the same,” McManus said, “we’re more relatable.”

With fire departments [hamstrung with staffing shortages](#), expanding the potential recruitment pool can make a huge difference.

“The most important thing about getting more women and diversity in the fire service is not acting like we’re already there,” McManus said. “If we’re going to stand up and say diversity is one of our core values, we can’t be done.”

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HEADLINE	01/13 ESD jobless nightmare as recession looms
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/wa-jobless-workers-living-surrealistic-nightmare-as-recession-looms/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/wa-jobless-workers-living-surrealistic-nightmare-as-recession-looms/</a>
GIST	Even as economists are forecasting an economic slowdown and rising unemployment in Washington later this year, the state system that provides benefits to jobless workers hasn’t even recovered from the last slump.

Washingtonians still wait longer to get benefits from the state Employment Security Department than they did before COVID shuttered the economy in 2020, even though fewer are filing claims. Workers whose benefits are delayed struggle to get help: calls to the ESD's help desk were answered just 12.5% of the time in December.

"It's just been like a surrealistic nightmare," said Aydin Bates, 22, of Tacoma, who has spent months wrangling with ESD over \$1,300 in pandemic benefits the agency wants back; she's appealing her case while also working a full-time job.

In December, state auditors [chided ESD for being slow to fix performance issues](#) exacerbated by the pandemic. The agency has disputed some of those [criticisms](#), but has also promised big changes, including a new \$4.5 million phone system due online in April.

But the deeper problem, some state legislators and worker advocates say, is that Washington's entire unemployment system today is trying to do too much with too little money — and so far, state budget writers haven't come through with needed funding.

Start with the workload. The good news: fewer Washingtonians are filing new jobless claims — just 6,835 last week versus 8,950 in the same week in 2020. But the unemployment system's workload is actually higher now thanks to a slew of problems left over from the pandemic era of Feb. 2, 2020, to Sept. 4, 2021, when federal pandemic benefits ended.

Anti-fraud measures added after the \$650 million impostor scam in 2020, for example, have slowed payments because ESD has to more thoroughly scrutinize claimants' identities.

Rita Santiago, a former city of Seattle contractor, said her November claim was delayed by a verification process that, ESD staff told her, was taking six to eight weeks. Her benefits finally arrived in January, but not before Santiago, 67, found herself "living on savings."

An even larger pandemic hangover: so-called overpayments.

ESD has identified an eye-popping 136,000 claimants who collectively owe \$1.2 billion in pandemic-era benefits they may not have been entitled to, often due to complicated eligibility rules claimants didn't know they were breaking. A total of \$21.6 billion was paid out during the pandemic period.

Some claimants have been asked to repay \$30,000 to \$40,000 or more, said John Tirpak, executive director of the Seattle- and Spokane-based Unemployment Law Project, which represents workers in unemployment disputes. Yet many facing repayment are "working people who don't have money" to cover such a debt, Tirpak said.

Some, like Bates, have appealed their overpayment case — only to bog down in another pandemic hangover: a backlog of nearly 28,000 appeals, mostly over pandemic-related benefits disputes, at the state Office of Administrative Hearings.

That's down from a peak of more than 46,000 last April, according to the hearings office [dashboard](#), but still more than eight times the average pre-pandemic queue. The average ESD appeal now takes seven months to be heard, up from around 30 days before COVID.

Chelsea, a South King County resident, is appealing her October claim, which ESD denied, and was told she wouldn't get a hearing until the end of the year. "So I haven't been getting any benefits this entire time and won't until the appeal goes whichever way," said Chelsea, who asked that her last name be withheld to protect her privacy.

Some of these pandemic hangovers can be eased by federal and state policy changes. ESD officials say "tens of thousands" of claimants won't need to repay the overpayment funds, thanks to emergency federal waivers.

But determining who qualifies for waivers means more work for a system that arguable lacks the money for its current workload.

Federal funds cover most of the cost of running ESD's unemployment insurance program. (Benefits themselves are typically funded via employers' state taxes.) But because federal funding is tied in part to a state's new claims volumes, federal dollars soared during the pandemic but have since fallen back.

That has led ESD to slash the customer service staff, from 964 in late 2021 to just 271 as of the end of December — in the middle of the winter surge in unemployment claims. (Ditto at the hearings office, where staff dedicated to ESD cases has fallen from a pandemic high of 60 last spring to around 45 today.)

Those cuts are causing trouble across the unemployment system.

Over the last six months of 2022, just 73% of claimants received their first benefit payment within 21 days of filing, according to U.S. Department of Labor data. That's a big improvement from the pandemic era, but still well short of the second half of 2019, when the agency saw around 16% more claimants but paid 90% of them within 21 days.

Cuts have also affected the way ESD connects with claimants. Nearly 85% of calls to ESD received a busy message in December, compared to under 20% in early 2022, when the agency also saw high call volumes.

Among those unable to get through was Seattle resident Keith Rickards, who tried repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, to reach ESD after filing a claim in November before finally giving up.

Although ESD's website says that agents who can't answer a claimant's questions right away will schedule a callback for the following day, "I haven't even been able to speak to anyone to schedule a callback," Rickards said in late December. His claim was finally approved Jan. 11, nearly two months after he was laid off.

ESD's lagging performance is raising concerns not only over current workloads, but also over the possibility of an economic slowdown widely expected later this year.

State forecasters expect unemployment to rise to 5.2% by 2024, versus 3.7% last year, which would mean tens of thousands more Washingtonians looking for work by then, and, presumably, filing for benefits.

"That's definitely something that we are preparing for as best we can," said ESD spokesperson Clare DeLong.

For example, to cover some lost federal funding, ESD asked for an extra \$21.2 million in Gov. Jay Inslee's proposed 2023-2025 budget. That included \$12.6 million for 55 additional staff to fight fraud, which ESD sees as a major factor in claims delays.

Of the \$21.2 million, however, Inslee's budget proposal included just \$2 million, which is intended to maintain ESD's current 50 anti-fraud staffers.

"We have to weigh multiple competing priorities across state government such as K-12 and behavioral health," Jaime Smith, a governor's office spokesperson, said in an emailed response to questions about ESD's budget request.

But Smith allowed that "the governor's proposal is a starting point for discussion with legislators" during the budget process in coming months — and some legislators says ESD could still end up with more state money.



“Our role ... now is to make sure we can get [ESD] the funding they need to do the jobs we’re requiring [the agency] to get done,” said state Rep. Liz Berry, D-Seattle, one of dozens of lawmakers who pushed for upgrades in the state unemployment system in 2021.

Others worry that the urgency to fund ESD isn’t as sharp as it was a year ago, when lawmakers were swamped with emails and calls from desperate constituents. “So it is probably not a super hot-button topic in most legislative offices right now,” said Joe Kendo, lobbyist with the Washington State Labor Council. But, he added, if the economy sours, unemployment would quickly become “a big deal” again.

For now, ESD thinks it truly can do more with less. Agency leaders are emphasizing system improvements over additional staff, including new technologies, such as the phone system and a new, AI-powered virtual assistant. The latter “needs more work,” said JR Richards, director of unemployment insurance customer support.

At the Office of Administrative Hearings, the constraint is less about money than about hiring and retaining temporary judges in a tight labor market, said Lorraine Lee, chief administrative law judge. The agency is bringing on four more judges this month and hopes for another four by March.

Some legislators are skeptical. State Rep. Gerry Pollet, D-Seattle, who chairs the joint committee overseeing performance audits, says ESD hasn’t been sufficiently forthcoming with metrics that lawmakers could use to gauge the agency’s improvements. ESD has disputed that criticism and also says more metrics will be available when the new phone system launches.

Pollet also wants ESD to activate at least some members of an emergency staff reserve that the agency recruited at the behest of state legislators. ESD says activation likely would require federal funding, which wouldn’t be available unless the state sees a significant jump in claims.

But Pollet wants ESD to lobby now for state funds for that reserve, and he worries that ESD may be swamped again if the predicted slowdown leads to “an upsurge in claims.”

In the meantime, some claimants, still ensnared by the lingering effects of the pandemic recession, may look elsewhere for assistance in the next one.

That may include Bates. “If I would have known the amount of stress and chaos this was going to cause me, I never would have applied” for the benefits in the first place, she said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/13 Facebook, Microsoft pull out of more offices</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/facebook-microsoft-pulling-out-of-more-seattle-area-offices/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/facebook-microsoft-pulling-out-of-more-seattle-area-offices/</a>
GIST	<p>In the latest sign of change in the tech sector — and softness in the office market here — Facebook parent Meta and Microsoft are separately vacating office buildings in Seattle and Bellevue.</p> <p>On Friday, Facebook confirmed plans to sublease its offices at the six-story Arbor Block 333, on Eighth Avenue North in downtown Seattle, and in the 11-story Block 6 of the Spring District in Bellevue. The Menlo Park, California-based social media giant said it is also reviewing leases for other Seattle-area office buildings.</p> <p>The same day, Redmond-based Microsoft confirmed <a href="#">reports</a> that it won’t renew its lease at the 26-story City Center Plaza in Bellevue when that lease ends in June 2024.</p> <p>The announcements come as the continued popularity of remote work and a tech slowdown with massive layoffs have both cut into demand for office space in Seattle and elsewhere.</p> <p>Both Meta and Microsoft have embraced remote work while paring back their workforces as the tech sector swoons.</p>

In November, [Meta announced layoffs of 726 Seattle-area workers](#).

Meta spokesperson Tracy Clayton said the leasing decisions were primarily driven by the company's move toward remote, or "distributed," work. But he acknowledged that, "given the economic climate," Meta was also "trying to be ... financially prudent."

Meta currently occupies all of Arbor Block 333 and would have occupied all of Block 6, which is scheduled to open later this year. The company still has offices in 29 buildings, and nearly 8,000 workers, in the Seattle area, which remains the company's second-largest engineering hub outside of its Menlo Park headquarters, Clayton said.

A Microsoft spokesperson characterized its decision about City Center Plaza as part of an ongoing evaluation of the firm's "real estate portfolio to ensure we provide an exceptional place to work and create greater collaboration and community for our employees."

The City Center Plaza decision also comes amid [a massive remodeling of Microsoft's Redmond campus](#), part of which will be completed in late 2023.

But Friday's news adds to an already downbeat forecast for the Seattle-area office market as it struggles against economic headwinds and the sluggish return of remote office workers.

That struggle is most visible in downtown Seattle, where total office vacancy now stands at around 25%, according to a new report by commercial real estate agency Colliers.

Connor McClain, senior vice president and leasing expert at Colliers, said office industry insiders have been anticipating more leasing decisions like these as tech firms extend their remote work policies and cut their body count.

"Given the macroeconomic conditions and the hybrid work trend, we believe we'll see an uptick in office vacancy over the next couple of quarters," McClain said.

Friday's news wasn't a big surprise on the Eastside, either. Although Bellevue has fared better than its cross-lake rival — total downtown vacancy is just 12%, according to Colliers — it has also seen several high-profile departures.

Last year, Microsoft announced plans to not renew leases at several Eastside buildings, including Advanta Office Commons on 160th Avenue Southeast and in Lincoln Square North. In July, Amazon [paused construction](#) at some of its Bellevue campus.

"Like most urban centers, we expect to see increasing vacancy rates because of hybrid work," said Patrick Bannon, president of the Bellevue Downtown Association, in an emailed statement.

He added that City Center Plaza's "amenities ... and proximity to the transit center, future light rail and I-405" will make it attractive to new tenants.

Some real estate industry insiders expect to hear more leasing news in the near future, given continued softness in the tech sector and uncertainty over the future of remote work.

But some also see silver linings.

Because subleased office space is typically leased at a discount, Meta's moves at Arbor Block 333 and Block 6 could mean openings for firms otherwise priced out, said Colliers' McClain.

"This creates opportunity for local startups or for large out-of-market companies who typically couldn't afford it here," he said.

HEADLINE	<b>01/13 Rats: creepy, clever, everywhere in Seattle</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/rats-in-seattle-theyre-creepy-clever-and-everywhere-but-there-is-help/">https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/rats-in-seattle-theyre-creepy-clever-and-everywhere-but-there-is-help/</a>
GIST	<p>YES, RATS DO come up toilets. Yes, it's a startling and scary image: those beady eyes, pointy front incisors, long scaly tails, their rhythmic sniffing. Sniffing for what?</p> <p>Your doom, that's what. You live in Seattle, a city that always ranks among the rattiest in the country.</p> <p>Rats have always scared humans. At its worst, it's called musophobia.</p> <p>In George Orwell's dystopian "1984," about a bleak, totalitarian society, the protagonist is broken when a <a href="#">cage filled with hungry rats</a> is placed around his head.</p> <p>And in a just plain creepy scenario, you have a man whose home is in Magnolia and who makes this report to Public Health — Seattle &amp; King County: "Well, we came back from a trip, and there was a dead rat in our basement toilet."</p> <p>The man concludes, "Reconsidering my wife's desire to get a cat. Questioning a lot of things in life now ..."</p> <p>A rat in a toilet does raise existential thoughts.</p> <p>The above report is from a July 2020 public records request to the agency. That year and in 2021, it got a dozen-and-a-half such spooky reports.</p> <p>Here's another one, from October 2021 in the 98115 Zip code, which includes Bryant and Maple Leaf. Rats are equal opportunists. Every neighborhood is good pickings.</p> <p>"... [W]e had a rat come up through the bathroom toilet in the living room that we discovered after hearing a noise coming from the toilet. We chased that rat out of the house and then again that same evening heard the same noise from the bathroom, and yet another rat had popped up in the toilet bowl, which we also chased out."</p> <p>SEATTLE ALWAYS MAKES the <a href="#">Top 50 Rattiest Cities List</a> from Orkin, a national pest control company. The list is based on new rodent treatments done by the firm. Seattle bounces between No. 9 and No 11 (in 2022).</p> <p>Not surprisingly, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles are at the top.</p> <p>Rats have gotten to be such a problem in the Big Apple that in December, the city advertised for a <a href="#">Rat Czar</a> (official title: "director of rodent mitigation"), which paid \$120,000 to \$170,000. The ideal candidate was expected to possess "stamina and stagecraft" to defeat a "cunning, voracious and prolific" army.</p> <p>From 2005 until late 2022, Seattle got more than 6,300 rat complaints, according to another public records request. It likely would have gotten more if residents had known where to complain. When 1,900 people responded to an online rat survey the agency prepared in 2022, a common response was, "I was not aware" it provided rodent services.</p> <p>It does, with plenty of online tips at <a href="http://kingcounty.gov/rats">kingcounty.gov/rats</a>, including, upon availability, "rodent prevention kits or ... rodent prevention technical assistance."</p> <p>The agency's small staff of three includes two inspectors who spend half their time dealing with rat complaints and the other half baiting sewers with small wax blocks that are dangled on a wire. The blocks,</p>

says the manufacturer of Talon Weatherblok XT, are “palatable to rodents” because of their “high-density grain content.”

They also contain brodifacoum, a lethal anticoagulant poison that results in internal bleeding. In this case, the dead rats end up washed away in the sewer.

Various rodenticides have been a source of controversy, with the [National Pesticide Information Center](#), a cooperative between Oregon State University and the EPA, stating that secondary poisoning can result in birds such as hawks and owls that eat poisoned prey. The same holds true for cats and dogs, with the [ASPCA](#) recommending immediate veterinary treatment for pets showing such signs as “weakness, tremors and seizures.”

Seattle’s rat-baiting program was featured in a [June 2022 research paper](#) led by Xiacong (Maggie) Guo in earning her master’s degree in occupational and environmental health at the University of British Columbia. She tracked more than 1,700 manholes here that had been geotagged for their location.

Conclusions: Older sewers have more rats, maybe because of disrepair or decay. Rats prefer pipes in higher elevations because they don’t flood as much during storms, flushing out food and rat nests. Rats like sewer pipes that aren’t buried very deep, likely because tree roots can penetrate them easier. Rats like sewer pipes that carry human waste — as disgusting as it sounds, they like eating it. Finally, also disgusting, rats like narrower sewer pipes because they’re more likely to get blocked up with human waste.

THOSE 6,300 COMPLAINTS in Seattle sometimes pit neighbors against each other.

June 2022, Shoreline: “ ... [S]he is reporting her neighbor next door, who is having overgrown vegetation — blackberries and the grass is also a foot high on her backyard, attracting the rodents into the neighborhood. Complainant has been offering any kind of help to her neighbor to help to keep her yard clean, but she is refusing it.”

September 2022, Ballard: “We have a severe outdoor rat infestation ... Their food is the half-dozen bird feeders that our neighbors have sited along our shared fence. They do not clean up around the feeders and put out peanuts and ears of dried corn for the squirrels. When asked to change their feeder practices, they declined ... We have an astonishing amount of rat poop in our courtyard. The rats tunnel into our retaining wall and garden beds and leave large piles of dirt ... We’ve spent over \$1,000 trying to exterminate the rats, and the problem has only gotten worse. We’re worried the rats will eventually find their way into our home.”

The agency says that once a complaint is received, it sends out a letter to the property owner and in most cases conducts a visit. If rodents are found, a violation notice is issued. Owners can be issued three violation notices of at least two weeks each to do a clean-up. The agency prefers compliance through education.

After that a civil penalty is issued based on time spent by the inspectors — “at least \$2,000,” says the agency.

In 2021, according to another public records request, six rodent code violation liens were issued, and in 2022 none through September.

THE RATS, AND MICE, that most commonly cause problems in our cities are not even natives.

There is the misnamed Norway rat — also called the brown, sewer or wharf rat — actually a native from northern China or Mongolia.

There is the black rat or roof rat, with a tail nearly always longer than its body. It’s native to India and possibly other regions of South Asia.

Then there is the house mouse, native to Central Asia.

The Romans called mice *mus minimus* (little mouse) and rats *mus maximus* (big mouse).

Wherever humans have gone, says Bobby Corrigan, a nationally known rat expert out of Westchester County, New York, these rodents have followed. Why not? We offer plenty of food pickings.

Starting in Asia, “Both rats and the mice likely hitched rides on wagons heading westward to Europe,” he says. From there, they hopped on boats going across the Atlantic to the East Coast, or on boats going from China to the West Coast.

Then settling in was easy. They just climbed down the ship mooring ropes.

That’s why, eventually, [rotating discs](#) were placed on the ropes. When a rat tried to climb over it, the disc began to spin, and supposedly the animal dropped in the water. But, as with other efforts to control the rodents, it was too late.

From tagging along on ships, “It became planes, trains and automobiles,” says Corrigan. Give credit where credit is due.

“We’re the most successful mammal on the planet Earth. The house mouse is the second-most successful. Then rats probably come in third,” he says.

Corrigan has taken his [Rodent Academy](#) workshop for pest controllers to numerous cities, including Seattle. Corrigan certainly has the background, having published more than 160 technical publications in urban pest management.

Get used to these rodents, he says. They will always be with us.

For an April 2019 National Geographic story, Corrigan helped with a hypothetical example of how fast an urban rodent colony can grow.

With rats, “It takes them about three months before they themselves become sexually mature and start having their own family,” says Corrigan.

Starting out with a litter of nine pups, you’d end up with 11,907 rats by year’s end.

Of course, he says, “You’re never going to achieve that. Everything has natural checks and balances.”

SEATTLE’S BATTLE WITH rats goes back a long way.

We’re a seaport city, and we have a temperate climate. Nice for rodents.

By the time the Great Seattle Fire of 1889 was over — it began on the afternoon of June 6, when glue boiled over in a woodworking shop — the entire central business district was destroyed. A University of Washington [paper](#) on the fire said an estimated 1 million rats were killed.

There is no citation for that estimate, but the figure shows the extent to which the rodents had settled in.

After the fire, it didn’t take long for them to return. Six years later, a [Feb. 14, 1905, Seattle Daily Times](#) story carried this headline: “Rats! City Hall vaults invaded and valuable papers eaten up. Rodents swarm through municipal offices day and night.”

The rats were described as “as large as kittens.”

A considerably more serious rat event took place in 1907, when three Seattle residents died after contracting the bubonic plague, which typically happened after being bitten by a rodent flea carrying the plague bacterium.

The bubonic plague is still around, mostly in “[rural and semirural areas](#) of the western United States,” says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The disease can be treated with antibiotics, the earlier the better. The agency carries a long list of diseases spread by rodents, ranging from hantavirus to rat-bite fever.

The bubonic plague arrived in Seattle from thousands of rats living on ships that had traveled from Asia to San Francisco to here, according to HistoryLink.

An Oct. 22, 1907, Seattle Daily Times story told of Seattle offering a [10-cent bounty](#) (about \$3.20 in today’s dollars) for each rat brought in that was confirmed to be carrying the bacterium. When not enough rats were eliminated, a Nov. 8 story that year said the bounty was increased to \$5 (\$158 in today’s dollars).

The bounty was fine, warned an Oct. 23 [Seattle Daily Times story](#) that year, but, “Death to all rats is not enough.” It told how sewage from North End areas such as Fremont and the University District was dumped directly into Lake Union. It told of garbage-strewn alleys and backyards with just 35 wagons in the city for hauling by a “garbage trust” that “work when they please.”

By November of that year, Seattle had passed two ordinances to improve sanitary conditions, and one of the nation’s first ratproofing ordinances.

Another rat control effort by Seattle was a 1970 Model City project. A July 4 Seattle Times story from that year reported [274 tons of trash](#) collected from the Yesler to Madrona neighborhoods, mostly by volunteers. Another story reported on middle-school kids drawing rat posters, with the grand-prize winner showing a rodent scurrying toward a hole at the bottom of a door: “Ready or not, here I come.” Nice try. The rats stayed.

THESE DAYS, THERE is enough rat business (as well as for insects, spiders, birds and other animal pests) for the state’s Department of Agriculture to have issued 508 general pest control licenses. You need to pass an exam.

Says Chris Somers, service manager for Rambo Total Pest Control out of Puyallup, “From what we’ve seen, the rodent problem has gotten worse. We actually saw a brief reduction during COVID, during the time that restaurants shut down. But since everything opened up, the rat activity has shot right back.”

(The business, by the way, is not named after the Sylvester Stallone movies. The owners are Luke and Tera Rambo.)

Somers asked clients whether they were willing to be photographed and interviewed for this story. No takers. “A lot of the time when it comes to pest activity, people can be a bit embarrassed and question what they have done to create the problem,” he says.

Marieka Klawitter and Fiona Lee, who live in a home in Phinney Ridge, were willing to be photographed. Not long ago, they greeted Nick Putman, a technician for Parker Eco Pest Control.

Their home has a basement redone as a full living area.

While there, “We heard the pitter-patter across the ceiling. I said, ‘I think that’s a rat,’ ” says Klawitter. Lee says that as she looked out the living room window, she could see a rat running across the fence separating them from a neighbor.

At one point, before calling the pest control company, the women stacked empty boxes at the bottom of the stairs, thinking that’d be too much trouble for the rat(s) to scramble over to get upstairs.



	<p>Putman placed snap traps inside the house and twice came out to plug holes outside with mesh screen and foam.</p> <p>He also shared some of his rat encounters. There was the time he was sealing up a crawl space while a guy he was training was holding a flashlight. "The rats were running over, and he was having a tough time keeping the light straight. It didn't bother me," he says.</p> <p>At the Phinney Ridge home, the women say no rat has since been heard inside their home.</p> <p>The way Putman sees his job is that rats make a lot of us spooked.</p> <p>"Honestly, it's what keeps me busy. I'm not afraid of rats. It's a game of comfort," he says.</p> <p>Say, on that comfort issue, what's that noise in your attic? Pitter-patter. Pitter-patter.</p>
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## Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/17 Bitcoin is on the charge in 2023
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/technology/cryptoverse-bitcoin-is-back-with-bonk-2023-01-17/">https://www.reuters.com/technology/cryptoverse-bitcoin-is-back-with-bonk-2023-01-17/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan 17 (Reuters) - Bitcoin is on the charge in 2023, dragging the crypto market off the floor and electrifying bonk, a new meme coin.</p> <p>The No.1 cryptocurrency has clocked a 26% gain in January, leaping 22% in the past week alone, breaking back above the \$20,000 level and putting in on course for its best month since October 2021 - just before the Big Crypto Crash.</p> <p>Ether has also risen, by 29% this year, helping drive the value of the overall global cryptocurrency market above \$1 trillion, according to CoinGecko.</p> <p>"After a rough year last year for cryptos, we are seeing a form of mean reversion," said Jake Gordon, analyst at Bespoke Investment Group, referring to the theory of asset prices returning to long-term averages.</p> <p>Researchers said investor bets on a rosier macroeconomic picture were driving a jump in riskier assets across the board.</p> <p>Few crypto tokens have benefited more than bonk, which was launched at the end of December on the Solana blockchain and had rocketed 5,000% by early January. It has since fallen back, though remains up 910% since the start of the year.</p> <p>It is the latest entrant to the hyper-volatile world of meme coins, cryptocurrencies inspired by online memes and jokes, and is modeled after the same grinning Shiba Inu dog as dogecoin - which itself was catapulted to fame by Elon Musk tweets.</p> <p>Bonk's a puppy, though.</p> <p>Even at its peak it was worth just \$0.000004873759 with a market capitalization of about \$205 million.</p> <p>Other meme tokens are also up, with dogecoin and Shiba Inu up 19% and 27% respectively in 2023.</p> <p>But buyers beware.</p>



"Investors need to be especially cautious when it comes to coins like doge, Shiba Inu and bonk," said Les Borsai, co-founder of digital assets services firm Wave Financial.

"They fall just as hard as they surge."

Nonetheless, some market players pointed to the relative cheapness of these tokens - doge is worth about eight cents - as a reason why speculators were willing to place bets on them.

"Meme coins belong to crypto, it's part of the culture," said Martin Leinweber, digital assets product specialist at MarketVector Indexes. "It just takes a few lines of codes to create a meme token and if you have a community for it, people love that."

#### RUMORS OF SOL'S DEATH EXAGGERATED

Bonk is a meme coin with a mission. It was created, in part, to support the Solana blockchain, which has seen an exodus of funds and users since crypto exchange FTX filed for bankruptcy in November, and its native Solana token drop over 37%.

The Solana token has now indeed jumped as bonk has gained traction: it's up 131% in 2023, the biggest gainer among major cryptocurrencies.

"Rumors of Solana's death seem to have been greatly exaggerated," said Tom Dunleavy, senior research analyst at data firm Messari. "Despite the recent price appreciation seemingly being driven by speculation, the underlying ecosystem remains quite strong."

#### TOO EARLY TO CALL A CRYPTO REVERSAL

Some researchers chalked the crypto gains up to optimism that inflation had peaked, reducing the need for tighter central bank policy.

"Bitcoin and crypto tend to front-run everything, which is why we've seen notable relative strength in this asset class of late," said Wave Financial's Borsai.

There's certainly been an increase in activity.

The dollar value of bitcoin trading volumes on major exchanges over a 7-day period jumped to \$151 million, the highest in nearly two months, according to data from Blockchain.com.

Total bitcoin flows - representing all uses including trading and payments - have increased by 13,130 bitcoin on average in the last 7 days, the largest rise in 64 days, Chainalysis data showed.

However, market watchers warned against celebrating too soon, noting trading volumes remained low and the macroeconomic environment uncertain.

"It's too early to declare a definitive reversal for the crypto market despite the recent strength we've seen of late," said Aaron Kaplan, co-founder of Prometheus, a digital asset securities trading platform.

"If interest rate increases are below what the market expects, then risk assets will benefit and crypto prices will likely continue the uptrend, but there's just too much uncertainty right now."

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HEADLINE	01/16 CISA warns: flaws affecting ICS
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/cisa-warns-for-flaws-affecting.html">https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/cisa-warns-for-flaws-affecting.html</a>
GIST	The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has released several Industrial Control Systems (ICS) advisories warning of critical security flaws affecting products from Sewio, InHand Networks, Sauter Controls, and Siemens.

The most severe of the flaws relate to Sewio's RTLS Studio, which could be exploited by an attacker to "obtain unauthorized access to the server, alter information, create a denial-of-service condition, gain escalated privileges, and execute arbitrary code," according to CISA.

This includes CVE-2022-45444 (CVSS score: 10.0), a case of hard-coded passwords for select users in the application's database that potentially grant remote adversaries unrestricted access.

Also notable are two command injection flaws (CVE-2022-47911 and CVE-2022-43483, CVSS scores: 9.1) and an out-of-bounds write vulnerability (CVE-2022-41989, CVSS score: 9.1) that could result in denial-of-service condition or code execution.

The vulnerabilities impact RTLS Studio version 2.0.0 up to and including version 2.6.2. Users are recommended to update to version 3.0.0 or later.

CISA, in a second alert, highlighted a set of five security defects in InHand Networks InRouter 302 and InRouter 615, including CVE-2023-22600 (CVSS score: 10.0), that could lead to command injection, information disclosure, and code execution.

"If properly chained, these vulnerabilities could result in an unauthorized remote user fully compromising every cloud-managed InHand Networks device reachable by the cloud," the agency said.

All firmware versions of InRouter 302 prior to IR302 V3.5.56 and InRouter 615 before InRouter6XX-S-V2.3.0.r5542 are susceptible to the bugs.

Security vulnerabilities have also been disclosed in Sauter Controls Nova 220, Nova 230, Nova 106, and moduNet300 that could allow unauthorized visibility to sensitive information (CVE-2023-0053, CVSS score: 7.5) and remote code execution (CVE-2023-0052, CVSS score: 9.8).

The Swiss-based automation company, however, does not plan to release fixes for the identified issues owing to the fact that the product line is no longer supported.

Lastly, the security agency detailed a cross-site scripting (XSS) flaw in Siemens Mendix SAML equipment (CVE-2022-46823, CVSS score: 9.3) that could permit a threat actor to gain sensitive information by tricking users into clicking a specially crafted link.

Users are advised to enable multi-factor authentication and update Mendix SAML to versions 2.3.4 (Mendix 8), 3.3.8 (Mendix 9, Upgrade Track), or 3.3.9 (Mendix 9, New Track) to mitigate potential risks.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Massive network fake cracked software</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/raccoon-and-vidar-stealers-spreading.html">https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/raccoon-and-vidar-stealers-spreading.html</a>
GIST	<p>A "large and resilient infrastructure" comprising over 250 domains is being used to distribute information-stealing malware such as <a href="#">Raccoon</a> and <a href="#">Vidar</a> since early 2020.</p> <p>The infection chain "uses about a hundred of fake cracked software catalogue websites that redirect to several links before downloading the payload hosted on file share platforms, such as GitHub," cybersecurity firm SEKOIA <a href="#">said</a> in an analysis published earlier this month.</p> <p>The French cybersecurity company assessed the domains to be operated by a threat actor running a traffic direction system (<a href="#">TDS</a>), which allows other cybercriminals to rent the service to distribute their malware.</p> <p>The attacks target users searching for cracked versions of software and games on search engines like Google, surfacing fraudulent websites on top by leveraging a technique called search engine optimization (SEO) poisoning to lure victims into downloading and executing the malicious payloads.</p>

The poisoned result comes with a download link to the promised software that, upon clicking, triggers a five-stage URL redirection sequence to take the user to a web page displaying a shortened link, which points to a password-protected RAR archive file hosted on GitHub, along with its password.

"Using several redirections complicates automated analysis by security solutions," the researchers said. "Carving the infrastructure as such is almost certainly designed to ensure resilience, making it easier and quicker to update or change a step."

Should the victim uncompress the RAR archive and run the purported setup executable contained within it, either of the two malware families, Raccoon or Vidar, are installed on the system.

The development comes as Cyble [detailed](#) a rogue Google Ads campaign that employs widely-used software such as AnyDesk, Bluestacks, Notepad++, and Zoom as lures to deliver a feature-rich stealer known as Rhadamanthys Stealer.

An alternate variant of the attack chain has been observed taking advantage of phishing emails masquerading as bank statements to dupe unwitting users into clicking on fraudulent links.

Fabricated websites impersonating the popular remote desktop solution have also been put to use in the past to propagate a Python-based information stealer dubbed [Mitsu Stealer](#).

Both pieces of malware are equipped to siphon a wide range of personal information from compromised machines, harvest credentials from web browsers, and steal data from various cryptocurrency wallets.

Users are advised to refrain from downloading pirated software and enforce multi-factor authentication wherever possible to harden accounts.

"It is crucial for users to exercise caution when receiving spam emails or to visit phishing websites and to verify the source before downloading any applications," the researchers said.

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HEADLINE	01/16 Zoho ManageEngine 'spray, pray' attacks
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securityweek.com/researchers-brace-zoho-manageengine-spray-and-pray-attacks">https://www.securityweek.com/researchers-brace-zoho-manageengine-spray-and-pray-attacks</a>
GIST	<p>Security researchers tracking a known pre-authentication remote code execution vulnerability in Zoho's ManageEngine products are warning organizations to brace for "spray and pray" attacks across the internet.</p> <p>The vulnerability, patched by Zoho last November, affects multiple Zoho ManageEngine products and can be reached over the internet to launch code execution exploits if SAML single-sign-on is enabled or has ever been enabled.</p> <p>According to researchers at automated penetration testing firm Horizon3.ai, the <a href="#">CVE-2022-47966</a> flaw is easy to exploit and a good candidate for so-called "spray and pray" attacks. In this case, the bug gives attackers complete control over the system or an immediate beachhead to launch additional compromises.</p> <p>"Once an attacker has SYSTEM level access to the endpoint, attackers are likely to begin dumping credentials via LSASS or leverage existing public tooling to access stored application credentials to conduct lateral movement," the company said in a <a href="#">note</a> documenting its work creating IOCs to help businesses hunt for signs of infection.</p> <p>Horizon3.ai red-teamer James Horseman is calling attention to exposed attack surfaces that put thousands of organizations at risk. "Shodan data shows that there are likely more than a thousand instances of ManageEngine products exposed to the internet with SAML currently enabled," Horseman said, estimating that roughly 10% of all Zoho Management products may be sitting ducks for these attacks.</p>

	<p>“Organizations that use SAML in the first place tend to be larger and more mature and are likely to be higher value targets for attackers,” Horseman warned.</p> <p>Although Zoho issued patches late last year, Horseman notes that some organizations are still be tardy on deploying the fixes. “Given how slow enterprise patch cycles can be, we expect that there are many who have not yet patched.”</p> <p>“We want to highlight that in some cases the vulnerability is exploitable even if SAML is not currently enabled, but was enabled sometime in the past. The safest course of action is to patch regardless of the SAML configuration of the product,” Horseman added.</p> <p>Zoho boasts that about 280,000 organizations across 190 countries use its ManageEngine product suite to manage IT operations.</p> <p>The Indian multinational firm, which sells a wide range of productivity and collaboration apps to businesses, <a href="#">has struggled with zero-day attacks</a> and major security problems that have been targeted by nation-state APT actors.</p> <p>The US government’s cybersecurity agency <a href="#">CISA has added Zoho vulnerabilities</a> to its federal ‘must-patch’ list because of known exploitation activity.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Most wanted malware: Qbot over Emotet</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/qbot-tops-december-2022s-most/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/qbot-tops-december-2022s-most/</a>
GIST	<p>The Qbot Trojan overtook Emotet as the most prevalent malware found in the wild in December 2022, impacting 7% of organizations worldwide. Additionally, the Glupteba malware, a blockchain-enabled Trojan botnet, returned to the top 10 list for the first time <a href="#">since July 2022</a>.</p> <p>The findings come from <a href="#">Check Point Software Technologies</a>, which published its <i>Global Threat Index</i> for December 2022 on Friday and shared it with <i>Infosecurity</i> via email.</p> <p>“Although Google managed to cause <a href="#">major disruption to Glupteba</a> operations in December 2021, it seems to have sprung back into action,” reads the report. “As a modular malware variant, [...] the botnet is often used as a downloader and dropper for other malware.”</p> <p>Another piece of malware growing in adoption in December 2022 was the ad-distributing Android threat known as <a href="#">Hiddad</a>, which entered the top-three mobile malware list for the first time in 2022, just before the end of the year.</p> <p>“It repackages legitimate apps and then releases them to a third-party store,” Check Point wrote. “Its main function is to display ads, but it can also gain access to key security details built into the OS.”</p> <p>In terms of industry, education/research remained the most attacked sector globally last month, followed by government/military and healthcare.</p> <p>As for the most exploited vulnerabilities in December 2022, a web server flaw that <a href="#">exposed GitHub repository information</a> was at the top of the list, followed by various vulnerabilities that leveraged a directory traversal flaw on different web servers (and that <a href="#">were number one</a> in this list in November 2022).</p> <p>According to Maya Horowitz, VP of research at Check Point Software, the overwhelming theme from the company’s latest research is how malware often masquerades as legitimate software to grant hackers backdoor access to devices without raising suspicion.</p> <p>“That is why it is important to do your due diligence when downloading any software and applications or clicking on links, regardless of how genuine they look,” Horowitz added.</p>

	<p>The latest <i>Global Threat Index</i> by Check Point Software is now available <a href="#">at this link</a> for more information about the latest active threats in the wild.</p> <p>The data comes days after security researcher Dominic Alvieri <a href="#">unveiled a new phishing campaign</a> that relies on social media accounts and fake websites to pretend to sell the hacking tool, Flipper Zero.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Third 'Hack the Pentagon' bug bounty</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/hack-the-pentagon-bug-bounty/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/hack-the-pentagon-bug-bounty/</a>
GIST	<p>The US Department of Defense (DoD) has confirmed it will soon launch the third part of its 'Hack the Pentagon' bug bounty program, first <a href="#">unveiled in 2016</a>.</p> <p>According to a dedicated page on the <a href="#">Sam.Gov website</a>, the initiative will rely on cybersecurity researchers to find vulnerabilities in the government's Facility Related Controls System (FRCS) network.</p> <p>"The Contractor shall provide all labor, material, equipment, hardware, software and training required to assess the current cybersecurity posture of the FRCS Network, identify weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and provide recommendations to improve and strengthen the overall security posture," reads a draft of the performance work statement (PWS) of the Hack the Pentagon 3.0 program.</p> <p>The FRCS infrastructure includes systems used to monitor systems related to real property facilities like fire and safety systems, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), utilities, and physical security systems, among others.</p> <p>"DoD has identified an emerging need to leverage a diverse pool of innovative information security researchers [...] via crowdsourcing, for vulnerability discovery, coordination and disclosure activities," the draft explains.</p> <p>The document also clarifies that the critical bounty program will only involve "unclassified Information Systems and operational technology contained within the <a href="#">Pentagon</a> FRCS Network."</p> <p>"These are sensitive Government assets; therefore, the Contractor will be required to leverage a private community of skilled and trusted researchers, which may be limited to US persons only, with eligibility criteria established by the DoD," the draft explains.</p> <p>Additionally, the draft is calling for researchers to be diverse in skillset and able to conduct source code analysis, reverse engineering and network and system exploitation.</p> <p>"The bounty execution or 'challenge phase' itself is expected to last no more than 72 hours in person. Access to assets and asset owners will be provided to the Contractor upon Contract award."</p> <p>The third installment of the Hack the Pentagon bug bounty program comes almost four years after the second one, which was <a href="#">unveiled in April 2018</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/17 Initial access broker activity doubles in year</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/initial-access-broker-activity/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/initial-access-broker-activity/</a>
GIST	<p>Security researchers detected twice as many cases of corporate access being sold on the dark web by initial access brokers (IABs) last year as during the previous 12 months, with the number of brokers also surging.</p> <p><a href="#">Group-IB</a> spotted 2348 instances of IAB sales activity between H2 2021 and H1 2022, with the number of countries in which victim organizations are located also increasing – by 41% to a total of 96 during the period.</p>

US companies were the most popular targets, while in terms of sectors it was manufacturing (5.8%), financial services (5.1%), real estate (4.6%) and education (4.2%) that were most frequently targeted.

Compromised RDP (36%) and VPN (37%) accounts were most commonly offered by IABs, according to Group-IB's report, [Hi-Tech Crime Trends 2022/2023](#).

The number of brokers also grew, from 262 to 380 during the period, which led to a 50% drop in prices for IAB access to \$2800. That led to a slight shrinking of the size of the global IAB market – down by 8.5% to \$6.7m.

Group-IB also found the IAB market increasingly saturated with logs obtained by information-stealing malware. It detected over 96 million up for sale, including 400,000 highly sought-after Single Sign-On (SSO) logs, of the sort purchased by the threat actor behind the recent Uber breach for just \$20.

These offerings are democratizing cybercrime to those with limited technical skills, warned Group-IB CEO, Dmitry Volkov.

“With remote work and SSO services becoming more prevalent, instances of access to corporate networks started appearing in stealer logs more often. Attacks on companies through their employees will become one of the main infection vectors,” he warned.

“A silver bullet against such attacks doesn't exist. The trend highlights the need for companies to improve their cybersecurity across all layers, including training employees to respond to social engineering, enhancing detection and response capabilities, and of course, monitoring the cyber-criminal underground for compromised employee records and offers to sell access to their networks.”

Thanks in part to a thriving IAB market, ransomware actors increased their victim count last year.

Some 2886 companies had sensitive data published on ransomware leak sites over the reporting period, a 22% increase on the previous year. However, many more victims may exist which didn't feature on such sites, as they paid up straight away.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Hacktivists leak Cellebrite, MSAB data</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hackread.com/hacktivists-leak-cellebrite-msab-data/">https://www.hackread.com/hacktivists-leak-cellebrite-msab-data/</a>
GIST	<p>The Israeli mobile forensics firm, <a href="#">Cellebrite</a>, has apparently suffered yet another data breach in which hackers managed to steal 1.7 TB of data. The hackers are also claiming to have stolen 103 GB of data from MSAB, a Sweden-based forensics firm.</p> <p>In both cases, the trove of information is available for download on DDoSecrets and the official website <a href="#">Enlace Hacktivista</a>. It is worth noting that, according to Enlace Hacktivista, the Cellebrite and MSAB data was provided to them by an “anonymous whistleblower.”</p> <p><b>Cellebrite Data Leak Details</b></p> <p>The Petah Tikva, Israel-based Cellebrite is <a href="#">frequently criticized</a> for aiding governments with its tools and spyware to monitor the activities of human rights activists, officials, dissidents, and journalists.</p> <p>Cellebrite UFED (Universal Forensics Extraction Device) is among its most famous services availed by intelligence agencies and law enforcement authorities globally to access data from mobile devices seized during investigations.</p> <p>This time, however, the company has become a target of the data breach. The data was later posted online by Enlace Hacktivista and DDoSecrets. Further analysis revealed that 103 GB of data from MSAB, a Sweden-based forensics firm, was also leaked. The firm is <a href="#">criticised for</a> providing services to repressive regimes including Myanmar's security forces.</p>



Both databases are currently being offered for downloading through torrents and direct downloads from [DDoSecrets](#) and [Enlance Hacktivist](#).

Here, it is worth mentioning that Cellebrite is known for breaking into passcode-secured smartphones, including Android and iOS devices, and extracting their data. In fact, [in 2019, the company claimed](#) its new tool could unlock “almost any iOS and Android device.

Reportedly, Cellebrite also played a major role in unlocking the iPhone device of San Bernardino back in 2016. Nevertheless, the apparent hack should not come as surprise since Cellebrite has a history of data breaches.

#### **Who Stole the Data?**

Enlance Hacktivist’s homepage revealed that they received the data from an anonymous whistleblower. They received it on January 13th, 2023. However, DDoSecrets and Enlance Hacktivist hadn’t made any claims about the source of data, its validity, and the sender’s identity.

#### **What Data is Leaked?**

An analysis of the 1.7TB archive indicated that it contained the full suite of Cellebrite programs. This includes its flagship software UFED, the Physical Analyser, Physical Analyser Ultra, license tools, and the Cellebrite Reader.

Moreover, there were technical guides and files used to localize the software. Customer documents were also part of the archive, dated from November 19th to December 3rd, 2022.

It is reported that sensitive data wasn’t leaked, and Cellebrite’s systems or customer information wasn’t impacted. Most of the leaked files are world maps and translation packs.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Vice Society leaks stolen university data</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/vice-society-ransomware-leaks-university-of-duisburg-essen-s-data/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/vice-society-ransomware-leaks-university-of-duisburg-essen-s-data/</a>
GIST	<p>The Vice Society ransomware gang has claimed responsibility for a November 2022 cyberattack on the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) that forced the university to reconstruct its IT infrastructure, a process that's still ongoing.</p> <p>The threat actors have also leaked files they claim to have stolen from the university during the network breach, exposing potentially sensitive details about the university's operations, students, and personnel.</p> <p>UDE has since confirmed that they are aware the threat actors published the stolen data and said that they will not be paying a ransom.</p> <p>"After the cyber attack on the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) at the end of November, the criminal group responsible for it has now published data on the Darknet," UDE said in a <a href="#">statement</a>.</p> <p>"The university had not complied with the attackers’ demands and had not paid a ransom."</p> <p>BleepingComputer has reviewed some of the leaked files and found they include backup archives, financial documents, research papers, and student spreadsheets. While they appear to be genuine, we have no way to confirm their authenticity.</p> <p>Vice Society's attack on the University of Duisburg-Essen continues the ransomware operation's continued targeting of the education sector.</p>



In 2022, the ransomware gang attacked the Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, the Medical University of Innsbruck, and the Los Angeles Unified school district.

These attacks led the FBI, CISA, and MS-ISAC to release a joint advisory warning that the ransomware gang is increasingly targeting U.S. school districts.

#### **Rebuilding UDE's IT infrastructure**

The cyberattack was disclosed by UDE on November 28th, 2022, forcing the university to shut down all email, communications, and IT systems until further notice. The university also canceled the planned exams right before the Christmas holiday.

By December 07th, 2022, UDE's IT specialists had returned several core systems to a functional state. In addition, on December 22nd, 2022, a widespread password reset action for the online learning platform affecting 40,000 people was taken.

However, UDE was still far from returning to normal operations.

On January 9th, 2023, UDE informed students and personnel that due to the extensive damage caused by the cyberattack, and the complex pattern of this damage, the only way to restore all systems would be to reconstruct the entire IT infrastructure.

UDE explained that the cyberattack had impacted 1,200 servers and compromised the central authorization system, so restoring all these would be impractical.

As for the impact of the (claimed) Vice Society attack on UDE, the university has 43,000 students, 4,000 academic staff, and 1,500 administrative staff. It is considered the top German university in the physics field.

In a 2019 interview, the CISO of UDE, Marius Mertens, discussed the successful mitigation of a ransomware attack. He highlighted the importance of the university's supercomputer, which ranked among the top 500 in Europe, and explained that disruption to its operations would result in significant financial losses.

"A downtime would entail huge costs when converted to the price tag of the lost CPU hours. For example, losing CPU hours for one week would cost us €75,000," explained Martens.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Hackers disrupt '24hrs Le Mans Virtual'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bitdefender.com/blog/hotforsecurity/hackers-disrupt-24-hours-of-le-mans-virtual-esports-event/?web_view=true%2F">https://www.bitdefender.com/blog/hotforsecurity/hackers-disrupt-24-hours-of-le-mans-virtual-esports-event/?web_view=true%2F</a>
GIST	<p>A security breach may have cost current Formula 1 World Champion Max Verstappen an esports championship victory yesterday, and he's not happy.</p> <p>Verstappen was competing in the "24 Hours of Le Mans Virtual" competition, the biggest esports event in endurance racing, which sees real-world FIA drivers compete alongside leading esports players for a total prize fund of US \$250,000.</p> <p>The five-round championship, which culminates in a live 24-hour finale, is ending on a sour note after server problems saw Verstappen - who was leading the race by over a minute - thrown out of the game and disconnected.</p> <p>When he was eventually able to return to the track, Verstappen had fallen back to 17th position.</p> <p>Over the following hour, Verstappen attempted to regain his lead - but only managed to fight back to 14th position, two laps behind the leaders.</p>

	<p>Perhaps understandably under the circumstances, Verstappen decided to quit the race, and raged online about how the virtual event had been organised:</p> <p><i>"This is the last time I am ever participating... Honestly it's a joke, you can't call this an event. Clown show... It's just a shame for everyone in the team because we all wanted to do well here and then you get this. I think I'm going to uninstall the game. That's nice. Frees up a bit of space on the PC anyway. I hope everyone uninstalls the game."</i></p> <p>Verstappen said he would have more chance to win if he went to a Las Vegas casino.</p> <p>Several other drivers reportedly experienced similar problems while competing in the race. Earlier in the race, the Le Mans Virtual organisers had confirmed that it had suffered a "suspected security breach"</p> <p><i>We are now taking the actions necessary to increase security and will aim to re-start the race as soon as possible.</i></p> <p>Although some may feel that "it's just a game, what does it matter?" the truth is that esports is big business. Large amounts of money are spent in connection with the creation and organisation of video game tournaments, multi-million dollar sponsorship deals, as well as gambling.</p> <p>Inevitably this can result in esports events being the target of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against gaming servers, whether it be done with the intention of extorting ransoms from those hosting the virtual competitions or simply mischief.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/16 Undercover with the leader of LockBit
SOURCE	<a href="https://therecord.media/ransomware-diaries-undercover-with-the-leader-of-lockbit/?web_view=true">https://therecord.media/ransomware-diaries-undercover-with-the-leader-of-lockbit/?web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>An unusual announcement appeared in Russian Dark Web forums in June 2020. Amid the hundreds of ads offering stolen credit card numbers and batches of personally identifiable information there was a Call for Papers.</p> <p>“We’re kicking off the summer PAPER CONTEST,” it read. “Accepted article topics include any methods for procuring shells, malware and malware coding, viruses, trojans, bot development... monetization.”</p> <p><a href="#">Jon DiMaggio</a>, chief security analyst at Analyst1, remembers seeing the ad when it first appeared and thinking to himself how odd it was to have some sort of academic call for papers pop up where cybercriminals tend to gather.</p> <p>“They’re calling for papers like in the name of education of the criminal community, DiMaggio told <a href="#">Click Here</a>. “As if they were helping out the young guys and gals coming up” in the cybercrime world.</p> <p>DiMaggio said that the summer paper contest was a strangely highbrow way to appeal to the vanity of a group that typically doesn’t get to claim much public credit for what they do: cybercriminals.</p> <p>That may partially explain why the contest ended up generating a huge amount of interest. The \$5,000 cash prize for the best paper probably had something to do with it, too. But it wasn’t just the novelty of introducing a contest that made DiMaggio take notice – it was who was sponsoring the competition: a Russian ransomware gang called <a href="#">LockBit</a>.</p> <p>That contest was the first in a long list of initiatives, unrelated to the bread-and-butter running of a ransomware gang, that a hacker named LockBitSupp did over the past two years to professionalize the group, according to DiMaggio who spent more than a year inside LockBit private channels interacting with LockBitSupp and other members.</p>

“LockBitSupp considers himself to be like a CEO of a company,” said DiMaggio, who believes LockBitSupp is more than just a support person or administrator for the group as his moniker implies.

This is just one of the insights from a new report called [Ransomware Diaries: Volume 1](#), released Monday, in which DiMaggio reveals how he infiltrated the group and what he learned while on the inside. [Click Here](#) was given an early look at it.

DiMaggio watched as LockBitSupp began upgrading the group’s infrastructure. He saw him recruit developers who were creating LockBit’s easy-to-use ransomware dashboards. He was privy to the group’s efforts to upend the traditional ransomware payment model by putting affiliates in charge.

LockBitSupp’s focus on professionalizing the group is part of the reason why LockBit has found such success in the cybercriminal world – the group accounted for [44% of the total ransomware attacks launched last year](#).

“He’s running it as a business and it’s why I believe that he spends so much time on criminal forums interacting and talking and being accessible,” DiMaggio said. “He wants LockBit to be popular and easy to approach.”

Last year, the cybercriminal world was rocked by a researcher who released years of internal chat logs from the Russian ransomware group Conti. [The chat logs](#) came to be known as the Panama Papers of the ransomware world because they gave observers an unfiltered look at how ransomware operations work.

DiMaggio’s report is a version of that. By sharing some of the chats he started and was privy to, he lays out how LockBit came to eclipse other ransomware operations – and what it plans to do in the future.

### **Do you speak German?**

DiMaggio’s relationship with LockBit and its leader started with a failed job interview. It was 2020 and LockBit was looking for coders. They put up a job posting for affiliates and DiMaggio applied. He didn’t expect to get very far in the process. “I’m not a hacker,” he said.

Even so, he did get a virtual interview and got as far as the LockBit assessment test. It was meant to measure whether an applicant really had the coding chops they claimed to have or were just script kiddies exaggerating abilities.

“The assessment test they gave me showed I wasn’t qualified enough,” DiMaggio said. “I didn’t expect to get through, but they did let me remain in their TOX channel,” which, it turns out, was a goldmine.

[TOX is a peer-to-peer instant messaging service](#), a kind of encrypted Skype that many cybercriminals prefer. Much of the world’s ransomware negotiations happen in TOX. So, being in the TOX channel for LockBit allowed DiMaggio to be a kind of fly on the wall, watching cybercriminals at work and in the wild.

But DiMaggio wanted to be more than a fly on the wall — he wanted to engage. So, he baited LockBitSupp. “I asked him if he thought an account being used by another ransomware group had been compromised by the FBI,” said DiMaggio. “I didn’t care what he said, but I saw it as an opportunity because he seemed so paranoid about that taking place.”

DiMaggio was pretending to be one of LockBit’s affiliates, or subcontractors, and he told LockBitSupp that the affiliates could be in jeopardy too. “And he was like, you know, I prefer to have these conversations not on these forums, but on our own infrastructure,” and he asked DiMaggio (or at least who he was pretending to be) to move the conversation there. The only problem was, LockBit was a Russian ransomware gang, and DiMaggio didn’t speak Russian.

“So I started off the conversation with German, and of course then he says, I don’t speak German,” DiMaggio said. “But here’s the thing. All of them speak a little bit of English because English speakers are their primary victims.”

So DiMaggio will often start conversations with ransomware actors with a ploy. “I’m like, do you speak English, type of thing. And they say, yes. And I’ll say, okay, well why don’t we try to communicate in English then?” he said. “And then I just have to remember to make sure my English isn’t too good as I communicate, but it works. And, and that’s exactly what I did with LockBit.”

Before he knew it, he and LockBitSupp were in the group’s private channel talking and in some ways LockBitSupp was exactly what DiMaggio was expecting. He was a guy who exaggerated his accomplishments and trash talked other groups. Where he was different was in his sense that in order for the ransomware industry to get “next level” it needed to be run more like a traditional business, and LockBitSupp had a plan to do just that.

“He constantly did things to get their name out there and then capitalize on the opportunity,” DiMaggio said.

### **Tattoo for \$500, Jack**

So LockBit started with a logo. A few ransomware groups – like Vice Society – were experimenting with that. LockBit’s logo – a red, white and black retro-looking rendition of their name – started appearing on everything they touched: on their leaks website, their letterhead, their ransom notes, anything they sponsored.

Then they tried their hand at a little IRL branding. They began offering people \$500 to \$1,000 to tattoo the LockBit logo on their bodies. “I heard that, I’m like, there is no way anyone is going to tattoo the name of a ransomware brand and their logo on their bodies,” said DiMaggio. “And then people did. That’s just crazy to me.”

Then LockBitSupp began working more strategically. He began studying the inefficiencies and bottlenecks in the ransomware business model, DiMaggio said. He began puzzling through what it was that stopped the average hacker from launching successful attacks – and why weren’t they using LockBit?

LockBitSupp’s solution was something he called LockBit Red. It was publicly branded as LockBit 2.0. Think of it as ransomware made easy. If you weren’t a great coder and wanted to make some cash launching ransomware attacks, not a problem. LockBit 2.0 was essentially point-and-click.

They created a dashboard to help hackers keep track of all the ransomware they had released into the world and then improved the encrypter so attackers could steal data faster. They even created push notifications that would alert attackers when a victim responded to a ransom demand.

He took what used to require weeks of being on a network and manually entering commands and writing scripts and automated it with a graphical interface for everybody. LockBitSupp certainly wasn’t the first person to try this, but he was the first to do it this well. LockBit’s central management console incorporated all the disparate elements of a ransomware attack, and put it in one place.

“They made a process that was convoluted, slow, and was putting data outside of their own control and made it fast, efficient, and going into their own infrastructure to use,” DiMaggio said.

### **Flip the Script**

But the thing that LockBitSupp did that was a game changer was upending the ransomware payment system, which was one of the biggest problems in the cybercriminal world. The difficulty isn’t so much getting a victim to pay a ransom; that was comparatively easy. The issue was paying all the people who worked on the attack.

Traditionally, ransomware gangs use subcontractors or affiliates. Think of them as specialists – people who might be particularly good at searching for vulnerabilities or cracking into particular kinds of networks.

Each hacker would do the specific thing they're good at then and collect that percentage of the ransom at the end. Almost like an invoicing system. Given the business they're in, it isn't too surprising that a lot of the time they didn't get the money that was owed.

"Not getting paid was a concern that was talked about a lot and still is talked about a lot on these criminal forums," DiMaggio said.

So Lockbit flipped the script, and put the affiliates in charge. "You as the affiliate, you do the negotiation and collect that money yourself and then you pay us our percentage," DiMaggio said, which is how it worked. "Inherently, it gives them trust and removes that fear of getting ripped off."

Once LockBit did that and upgraded their ransomware product, affiliates were banging down the doors to work with them. LockBit suddenly had more ransomware work than it knew what to do with, which goes a long way toward explaining why LockBit has been so formidable in the ransomware world today and found itself responsible for nearly half of all the ransomware attacks last year.

### **Hacking St. Mary's**

Last summer, Jon DiMaggio was in one of the LockBit chatrooms when members started crowing about its latest victim: A small Canadian town called St. Mary's. "The conversation was almost like high fives and laughing at the victims themselves – poking fun and how easy it was to compromise," said DiMaggio. The hacker version of locker room talk.

Attackers often go into these hacker forums and begin talking about what they just stole. "They like to go through the data to find the sort of the most embarrassing aspects of it... and share stuff," DiMaggio said. "And it's, it's usually, it's very much like an online bully – picking on the victim, talking trash as though it's some big joke."

But it doesn't feel like some big joke on the other end.

"You feel like the world's gonna end," the Mayor St. Mary's, Al Strathdee, told *Click Here*. "It's like being robbed... I felt like we were invaded and robbed and it was a smash and grab."

Strathdee has been elected mayor of St. Mary's, a town of around 7,700 in southwestern Ontario, three times. It sits a couple hours south of Toronto, about three hours north of Detroit. Its claim to fame? Thomas Edison worked here as a boy on the rail line and its outdoor quarry is Canada's largest outdoor swimming pool.

It was the last place one would expect Lockbit to set its sights on, though Strathdee says these days everyone's a target. "One of the things I've learned is that it's more common than you think," he said. "But at the time you think you know, first of all, your first reaction is why us? And what happened?"

Back in July of 2022, St. Mary's city IT department was doing some routine maintenance and discovered some irregularities. "They immediately isolated the system and unplugged the servers," Strathdee said, adding that "our initial thought is that they didn't even know they hit us."

Remember those push notifications that LockBit launched so ransomware attackers could track their victims? They may have played a role in the St. Mary's attack. "We're wondering whether they have systems that went back and told them that we had discovered them in our systems or maybe an alarm went off," he said, adding that the final report on the breach may tell them that for sure.

There was a ransom demand and city leaders thought about paying it, though he wouldn't say how much it was.

What Strathdee found stunning, after he did some reading about Lockbit, was that the group thought to strike his town. “I was told during one of the things that there has been an incident where you can actually rent this software from Loc Bit and they take a cut, which means it could have been anyone” who launched the attack.

In other words, it may not have been Lockbit itself that hacked them, but one of those affiliates the group had gotten so good at attracting. Strathdee said it is pretty clear to him now that just about everyone is vulnerable and everyone has to prepare for ransomware attacks now.

“You know, you talk a lot about roads and sewers and, and, and different things like sidewalks and things as being infrastructure,” he said. Cybersecurity is “becoming infrastructure as well, and we have to start thinking of it more. And we need to spend more money, a lot more money than we ever expected.

### **LockBit 3.0**

The question that Jon DiMaggio kept on wanting to answer was a human one: who does this kind of thing? Who thinks a hospital or a small city or school is a legitimate target?

DiMaggio used to do this kind of profiling and analysis for government intelligence agencies. So after spending more than a year lurking in chat rooms, lobbing in questions and watching the interactions between LockBitSupp and others in the ransomware world, what he thinks he’s pieced together is this: LockbitSupp is a white male in his mid- to late- thirties living in Russia or Eastern Europe. He grew up poor and that’s central to understanding him.

“He says that he was picked on for not having money and not having a lot of friends,” DiMaggio said. “So because of that this builds in these insecurities and when you get a lot of success, that breeds a very strong ego.

DiMaggio says LockBitSupp sees himself as a prince of darkness, like a Batman villain bent on sowing destruction. It is why he is always escalating. For example he wants to add Denial of Service attacks to the group’s ransomware menu. Because, LockBitSupp says in one chat, “DDoS attacks invigorate” him and “make life more interesting.”

But the thing about so-called Super Villains is that down deep, they have issues. For all their bravado, they’re a little insecure. And in Lockbit’s case – maybe less surprisingly – he’s super paranoid. That paranoia let DiMaggio get closer than he probably should have, and prevents LockBitSupp, DiMaggio says, from enjoying all the money he’s making.

“He can’t travel to places. He can’t go on vacation or leave certain areas of the world,” DiMaggio said. And because of all of this, he doesn’t seem happy.

DiMaggio assumes once the report goes public any personas he used to get close to LockBitSupp and his operation will be burned. But he maintains that the whole exercise was an important one because security officials are so focused on the technical parts of ransomware, they forget the people behind these attacks are only human.

Remembering that, he says, provides a roadmap on how to bring these groups down. DiMaggio said it would be easy to play on LockBitSupp’s paranoia and use information campaigns against him.

Which could explain why DiMaggio said his parting words to LockBitSupp would be this: “Watch your back. There’s researchers, there’s analysts, there’s law enforcement agencies and entire governments that are coming for you. Look over your shoulder. And when it’s hard to sleep at night,” DiMaggio paused, “That makes me smile.”

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/technology/chatgpt-artificial-intelligence-universities.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/technology/chatgpt-artificial-intelligence-universities.html</a>
GIST	<p>While grading essays for his world religions course last month, Antony Aumann, a professor of philosophy at Northern Michigan University, read what he said was easily “the best paper in the class.” It explored the morality of burqa bans with clean paragraphs, fitting examples and rigorous arguments.</p> <p>A red flag instantly went up.</p> <p>Mr. Aumann confronted his student over whether he had written the essay himself. The student confessed to <a href="#">using ChatGPT</a>, a chatbot that delivers information, explains concepts and generates ideas in simple sentences — and, in this case, had written the paper.</p> <p>Alarmed by his discovery, Mr. Aumann decided to transform essay writing for his courses this semester. He plans to require students to write first drafts in the classroom, using browsers that monitor and restrict computer activity. In later drafts, students have to explain each revision. Mr. Aumann, who may forgo essays in subsequent semesters, also plans to weave ChatGPT into lessons by asking students to evaluate the chatbot’s responses.</p> <p>“What’s happening in class is no longer going to be, ‘Here are some questions — let’s talk about it between us human beings,’” he said, but instead “it’s like, ‘What also does this alien robot think?’”</p> <p>Across the country, university professors like Mr. Aumann, department chairs and administrators are starting to overhaul classrooms in response to <a href="#">ChatGPT</a>, prompting a potentially huge shift in teaching and learning. Some professors are redesigning their courses entirely, making changes that include more oral exams, group work and handwritten assessments in lieu of typed ones.</p> <p>The moves are part of a real-time grappling with a new technological wave known as <a href="#">generative artificial intelligence</a>. ChatGPT, which was released in November by the artificial intelligence lab OpenAI, is at the forefront of the shift. The chatbot generates eerily articulate and nuanced text in response to short prompts, with people using it to write love letters, poetry, fan fiction — and their schoolwork.</p> <p>That has upended some middle and high schools, with teachers and administrators trying to discern whether students are using the chatbot to do their schoolwork. Some public school systems, including in <a href="#">New York City</a> and Seattle, have since banned the tool on school Wi-Fi networks and devices to prevent cheating, though students can easily find workarounds to access ChatGPT.</p> <p>In higher education, colleges and universities have been reluctant to ban the A.I. tool because administrators doubt the move would be effective and they don’t want to infringe on academic freedom. That means the way people teach is changing instead.</p> <p>“We try to institute general policies that certainly back up the faculty member’s authority to run a class,” instead of targeting specific methods of cheating, said Joe Glover, provost of the University of Florida. “This isn’t going to be the last innovation we have to deal with.”</p> <p>That’s especially true as generative A.I. is in its early days. OpenAI is expected to soon release another tool, GPT-4, which is better at generating text than previous versions. <a href="#">Google has built LaMDA</a>, a rival chatbot, and <a href="#">Microsoft is discussing a \$10 billion investment</a> in OpenAI. <a href="#">Silicon Valley start-ups</a>, including <a href="#">Stability AI</a> and <a href="#">Character.AI</a>, are also working on generative A.I. tools.</p> <p>An OpenAI spokeswoman said the lab recognized its programs could be used to mislead people and was developing technology to help people identify text generated by ChatGPT.</p> <p>At many universities, ChatGPT has now vaulted to the top of the agenda. Administrators are establishing task forces and hosting universitywide discussions to respond to the tool, with much of the guidance being to adapt to the technology.</p>



At schools including George Washington University in Washington, D.C., Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., and Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., professors are phasing out take-home, open-book assignments — which became a dominant method of assessment in the pandemic but now seem vulnerable to chatbots. They are instead opting for in-class assignments, handwritten papers, group work and oral exams.

Gone are prompts like “write five pages about this or that.” Some professors are instead crafting questions that they hope will be too clever for chatbots and asking students to write about their own lives and current events.

Students are “plagiarizing this because the assignments can be plagiarized,” said Sid Dobrin, chair of the English department at the University of Florida.

Frederick Luis Aldama, the humanities chair at the University of Texas at Austin, said he planned to teach newer or more niche texts that ChatGPT might have less information about, such as William Shakespeare’s early sonnets instead of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

The chatbot may motivate “people who lean into canonical, primary texts to actually reach beyond their comfort zones for things that are not online,” he said.

In case the changes fall short of preventing plagiarism, Mr. Aldama and other professors said they planned to institute stricter standards for what they expect from students and how they grade. It is now not enough for an essay to have just a thesis, introduction, supporting paragraphs and a conclusion.

“We need to up our game,” Mr. Aldama said. “The imagination, creativity and innovation of analysis that we usually deem an A paper needs to be trickling down into the B-range papers.”

Universities are also aiming to educate students about the new A.I. tools. The University at Buffalo in New York and Furman University in Greenville, S.C., said they planned to embed a discussion of A.I. tools into required courses that teach entering or freshman students about concepts such as academic integrity.

“We have to add a scenario about this, so students can see a concrete example,” said Kelly Ahuna, who directs the academic integrity office at the University at Buffalo. “We want to prevent things from happening instead of catch them when they happen.”

Other universities are trying to draw boundaries for A.I. Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Vermont in Burlington are drafting revisions to their academic integrity policies so their plagiarism definitions include generative A.I.

John Dyer, vice president for enrollment services and educational technologies at Dallas Theological Seminary, said the language in his seminary’s honor code felt “a little archaic anyway.” He plans to update its plagiarism definition to include: “using text written by a generation system as one’s own (e.g., entering a prompt into an artificial intelligence tool and using the output in a paper).”

The misuse of A.I. tools will most likely not end, so some professors and universities said they planned to use detectors to root out that activity. The plagiarism detection service Turnitin said it would incorporate more features for identifying A.I., including ChatGPT, this year.

More than 6,000 teachers from Harvard University, Yale University, the University of Rhode Island and others have also signed up to use GPTZero, a program that promises to quickly detect A.I.-generated text, said Edward Tian, its creator and a senior at Princeton University.

Some students see value in embracing A.I. tools to learn. Lizzie Shackney, 27, a student at the University of Pennsylvania’s law school and design school, has started using ChatGPT to brainstorm for papers and debug coding problem sets.

“There are disciplines that want you to share and don’t want you to spin your wheels,” she said, describing her computer science and statistics classes. “The place where my brain is useful is understanding what the code means.”

But she has qualms. ChatGPT, Ms. Shackney said, sometimes incorrectly explains ideas and misquotes sources. The University of Pennsylvania also hasn’t instituted any regulations about the tool, so she doesn’t want to rely on it in case the school bans it or considers it to be cheating, she said.

Other students have no such scruples, sharing on forums like Reddit that they have submitted assignments written and solved by ChatGPT — and sometimes done so for fellow students too. On TikTok, the hashtag #chatgpt has more than 578 million views, with people sharing videos of the tool [writing papers](#) and [solving coding problems](#).

One [video](#) shows a student copying a multiple choice exam and pasting it into the tool with the caption saying: “I don’t know about y’all but ima just have Chat GPT take my finals. Have fun studying.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Europol busts crypto fraud call centers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hackread.com/europol-busts-crypto-fraud-call-centers/">https://www.hackread.com/europol-busts-crypto-fraud-call-centers/</a>
GIST	<p>Europol, Eurojust, and judicial and law enforcement authorities in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Siberia, and Germany, collaborated against organized criminal gangs for their involvement in <a href="#">online cryptocurrency fraud</a>. Europol started supporting this operation in June 2022.</p> <p>Reportedly, the cyber criminals were operating via call centres. They lured victims into making hefty investments in <a href="#">fake crypto schemes</a>.</p> <p>To take down these gangs, Europol had set up an Operational Task Force to conduct an in-depth investigation. With the help of this team, Europol managed to dismantle the crypto fraud network that had targeted innocent users in Germany, Australia, Austria, and Canada and raked in millions of Euros. However, the number of victims is yet unclear because a high number of financial transactions were detected.</p> <p><b>Action Day Details</b></p> <p>On 11 January 2022, the Action day of this operation, the task force made 15 arrests. Of these, 14 suspects were arrested in Serbia and 1 in Germany. In addition, 261 individuals were questioned, including 42 in Bulgaria, 241 in Serbia, 3 in Germany, and 2 in Cyprus. Some of them are awaiting prosecution.</p> <p>Overall, the authorities searched 250 workplaces and 22 locations across all five countries, including 5 in Bulgaria, 15 in Serbia, and 2 in Cyprus. During their searches, the task force checked 4 call centres and 11 homes in Serbia, 2 companies and 2 homes in Bulgaria, and 2 homes in Cyprus.</p> <p>The team seized three hardware wallets containing \$1 million worth of cryptocurrencies and about EUR 50,000 in cash. They also seized three vehicles, data backups, more than 150 computers, two luxury apartments, electronic gadgets, and documents.</p> <p><b>How did the Scam work?</b></p> <p>According to Europol’s <a href="#">press release</a>, the cyber criminals operated the call centres from Serbia and used social networks to advertise for them. In addition, they used a tech infrastructure in Bulgaria for operational purposes. It is also alleged that Cyprus was the base for laundering the money.</p> <p>Many investors were attracted to their scheme via <a href="#">ads on social networking platforms</a>, from where they were redirected to malicious websites managed by criminals. Initially, they asked for low, three-digit sums and later increased the investment amount.</p>

The crooks typically contacted their victims by phone and spoke their native languages, e.g., English and German. They lured the targets into investing large amounts, all of which were subsequently lost. The Task Force searched and [seized all active call centres](#) in Serbia.

For your information, the investigation into this scam was launched in 2021 with a collaboration between the Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) in Stuttgart in Germany and the State Office of Criminal Investigations of Baden-Württemberg. A joint meeting was arranged in November 2022 to prepare for the Action day and get judicial, financial, and logistical support from the Task Force.

### **On-Ground Investigation**

Here are the details of the departments that conducted the operation on the ground.

**Bulgaria:** General Directorate National Police and Investigative Department in Sofia City PPO under the supervision of the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office

**Cyprus:** Crime Combating Department, Office for Executing European Investigation Orders and Letters of Request Limassol/Pafos Branch

Germany: PPO Stuttgart; State Office of Criminal Investigations Baden-Württemberg; Police Headquarters of Aalen and Reutlingen

**Serbia:** Special Public Prosecution Office for Combating High-Tech Crime; Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia – Service for Combating Organized Crime.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Liquor Control Board of Ontario hacked</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/canadas-largest-alcohol-retailers-site-hacked-to-steal-credit-cards/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/canadas-largest-alcohol-retailers-site-hacked-to-steal-credit-cards/</a>
GIST	<p>The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO), a Canadian government enterprise and the country's largest beverage alcohol retailer, revealed that unknown attackers had breached its website to inject malicious code designed to steal customer and credit card information at check-out.</p> <p>LCBO revealed on Wednesday that third-party forensic investigators found a credit card stealing script that was active on its website for five days.</p> <p>"At this time, we can confirm that an unauthorized party embedded malicious code into our website that was designed to obtain customer information during the checkout process," LCBO <a href="#">said</a>.</p> <p>"Unfortunately, customers who provided personal information on our check-out pages and proceeded to our payment page on LCBO.com between January 5, 2023, and January 10, 2023, may have had their information compromised."</p> <p>While the malicious script was active on the retailer's website, the attackers could harvest various personal and financial information submitted by customers during the check-out process.</p> <p>This includes customers' names, email and mailing addresses, credit card information, Aeroplan numbers, and LCBO.com account passwords.</p> <p>LCBO added that customers who used the mobile app or the <a href="https://www.vintageshoponline.com">vintageshoponline.com</a> online store to make orders were not affected.</p> <p>The company is still investigating the incident and is working on identifying all customers affected by this data breach.</p>

	<p>The attack was discovered on January 10, when LCBO warned that its website and mobile app were no longer available without explaining why they were taken down.</p> <p>One day later, the Canadian retailer revealed that the app and the LCBO.com website were offline because of a "cyber incident" being investigated.</p> <p>On January 12, two days after the breach was detected, LCBO issued a detailed statement revealing the nature of the attack and its impact on customers who used the online store and the mobile app while the credit card skimmer was active.</p> <p>The government-controlled company employs more than 8,000 people and operates 680 retail stores and five regional warehouse facilities.</p> <p>It's also a wholesaler to 450 grocery stores and provides wholesale support for 18,000 bars and restaurants.</p> <p>In web skimming (also known as Magecart) attacks like the one that affected LCBO's customers, threat actors inject JavaScript-based scripts known as credit card skimmers (aka Magecart scripts, payment card skimmers, or web skimmers) into compromised online stores designed to steal payment and personal information.</p> <p>The stolen info is later sold to other cybercriminals on hacking or carding forums or used in various identity theft or financial fraud schemes.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/13 Norton LifeLock customers victimized</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/remote-workforce/norton-lifelock-warns-on-password-manager-account-compromises">https://www.darkreading.com/remote-workforce/norton-lifelock-warns-on-password-manager-account-compromises</a>
GIST	<p>Norton LifeLock customers have fallen victim to a credential-stuffing attack. Cyberattackers used a third-party list of stolen username and password combinations to attempt to break into Norton accounts, and possibly password managers, the company is warning.</p> <p>Gen Digital, owner of the LifeLock brand, is sending <a href="#">data-breach notifications</a> to customers, noting that it picked up on the activity on Dec. 12, when its IDS systems flagged "an unusually high number of failed logins" on Norton accounts. After a 10-day investigation, it turns out that the activity stretched back to Dec. 1, the company said.</p> <p>While Gen Digital didn't say how many of the accounts were compromised, it did caution customers that the attackers were able to access names, phone numbers, and mailing addresses from any Norton accounts where they were successful.</p> <p>And it added, "we cannot rule out that the unauthorized third party also obtained details stored [in the Norton Password Manager], especially if your Password Manager key is identical or very similar to your Norton account password."</p> <p>Those "details," of course, are the strong passwords generated for any online services the victim uses, including corporate logins, online banking, tax filing, messaging apps, e-commerce sites, and more.</p> <p><b>Password Reuse Subverts Password Management</b></p> <p>In <a href="#">credential-stuffing attacks</a>, threat actors use a list of logins obtained from another source — buying cracked account info on the Dark Web, for instance — to try against new accounts, hoping that users have reused their email addresses and passwords across multiple services.</p> <p>As such, the irony of the Norton incident is not lost on Roger Grimes, data-driven defense evangelist at KnowBe4.</p>

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>"If I understand the reported facts, the irony is that the victimized users would have probably been protected if they had used their involved password manager to create strong passwords on their Norton logon account," he said via email. "Password managers create strong, perfectly random passwords that are essentially unguessable and uncrackable. The attack here seems to be that users self-created and used weak passwords to protect their Norton logon account that also protected their Norton password manager."</p> <p>Attackers lately have focused <a href="#">identity and access management systems</a> as a target, given that one compromise can unlock a veritable treasure trove of data across high-value accounts for attackers, not to mention a bevy of <a href="#">enterprise pivot points</a> for moving deeper into networks.</p> <p>LastPass, for instance, was targeted in August 2022 via <a href="#">an impersonation attack</a>, in which cyberattackers were able to breach its development environment to make off with source code and customer data. Last month, the company suffered a <a href="#">follow-on attack</a> on a cloud storage bucket that it uses.</p> <p>And last March, Okta <a href="#">revealed that</a> cyberattackers had used a third-party customer support engineer's system to gain access to an Okta back-end administrative panel for managing customers — among other things. About 366 customers were impacted, with two actual data breaches occurring.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/13 Tainted VPNs in EyeSpy surveillanceware
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/beware-tainted-vpns-being-used-to.html?&amp;web_view=true">https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/beware-tainted-vpns-being-used-to.html?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>Tainted VPN installers are being used to deliver a piece of surveillanceware dubbed EyeSpy as part of a malware campaign that started in May 2022.</p> <p>It uses "components of SecondEye – a legitimate monitoring application – to spy on users of 20Speed VPN, an Iranian-based VPN service, via trojanized installers," Bitdefender <a href="#">said</a> in an analysis.</p> <p>A majority of the infections are said to originate in Iran, with smaller detections in Germany and the U.S., the Romanian cybersecurity firm added.</p> <p>SecondEye, according to <a href="#">snapshots</a> captured via the Internet Archive, claims to be a commercial monitoring software that can work as a "parental control system or as an online watchdog." As of November 2021, it's offered for sale anywhere between \$99 to \$200.</p> <p>It comes with a wide range of features that allows it to take screenshots, record microphone, log keystrokes, gather files and saved passwords from web browsers, and remotely control the machines to run arbitrary commands.</p> <p>SecondEye previously came under the radar in August 2022, when Blackpoint Cyber revealed the use of its spyware modules and infrastructure for data and payload storage by unknown threat actors. The initial access mechanism used in these incidents is currently unknown.</p> <p>Bogdan Botezatu, director of threat research and reporting at Bitdefender, told The Hacker News that despite the use of the same spyware components, there is not enough evidence to connect the two sets of activities to a single campaign.</p> <p>The latest attack chain begins when an unsuspecting user downloads a malicious executable from 20Speed VPN's website, indicating two plausible scenarios: Either that its servers were breached to host the spyware or it's a deliberate attempt to spy on individuals who might download VPN apps to bypass internet blackouts in the country.</p> <p>Once installed, the legitimate VPN service is launched, while also stealthily kicking off a train of nefarious activities in the background so as to establish persistence and download next-stage payloads for harvesting personal data from the host.</p>

	"EyeSpy has the ability to fully compromise online privacy via keylogging and stealing of sensitive information, such as documents, images, crypto wallets, and passwords," Bitdefender researcher Janos Gergo Szeles said. "This can lead to complete account takeovers, identity theft and financial loss."
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Big tech companies prep for tough year</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/tech-companies-prepare-tough-2023-11673304542?mod=hp_lead_pos3">https://www.wsj.com/articles/tech-companies-prepare-tough-2023-11673304542?mod=hp_lead_pos3</a>
GIST	<p>A newly humbled cadre of globe-spanning tech giants are about to see their resilience tested.</p> <p>For years, the biggest tech companies have been lauded by investors—and at times assailed by smaller rivals and investigated by regulators—for how they appeared to be unstoppable juggernauts. Competitors, big fines and even a global recession brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic didn't stop revenue and profit from going up.</p> <p>Now the tide has turned.</p> <p>Another recession is looming. Europe is starting to put teeth behind its efforts to be tech's global regulator. And new competitors and technologies are threatening some big companies' holds on their markets. On top of that, big tech companies were seduced during the pandemic into heavy investments in personnel and new products predicated on the idea that the shift to virtual life would be enduring—something that hasn't panned out.</p> <p>In response, big tech companies are retrenching, cutting expenses faster than they have in decades in an effort to navigate what tech executives and even bullish investors say is likely to be a tough 2023. On Jan. 5, <a href="#">Amazon.com</a> Inc. said <a href="#">its layoffs</a> would affect some 18,000 employees. <a href="#">Meta Platforms</a> Inc. said it would <a href="#">cut 13% of its workforce</a>, or around 11,000 people. Google parent <a href="#">Alphabet</a> Inc. on Jan 11 <a href="#">announced staff reductions</a> of 15% at its healthcare unit Verily. Collectively, employers in the tech sector <a href="#">cut more than 170,000 jobs</a> in the past year, based on estimates from Layoffs.fyi, which tracks media reports and company announcements.</p> <p>"They've proven they can thrive in the go-go times, but the free-money era is gone," says Dan Ives, an analyst for Wedbush Securities, adding that he thinks big tech companies will ultimately navigate their troubles—which he calls a Category 5 storm—and stage a rebound. "Tech companies have spent like 1980s rock stars. Now they're starting to spend like senior citizens on a fixed budget."</p> <p><b>No easy road</b></p> <p>The economic factors behind the pivot to austerity are several, analysts say. Quickening inflation has led to higher interest rates. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has put new focus on supply-chain bottlenecks. And a recession would further damp demand—hitting advertising revenue that sustains some big tech companies, as well as consumer spending on electronics that feeds others.</p> <p>The new attitude comes as competition for big tech companies is becoming tougher—at least in some segments.</p> <p>Google and Meta saw their share of U.S. digital-ad spending last year fall below 50% for the first time since 2014 because they are growing more slowly than the rest of the market, according to research firm Insider Intelligence Inc. That is, in part, because Amazon and upstarts like ByteDance Ltd.'s TikTok have seen <a href="#">their share of digital ads grow</a>. But video-streaming services are also <a href="#">taking a growing share</a>—a trend that should accelerate the launch of ad-supported versions of <a href="#">Netflix</a> Inc. and <a href="#">Walt Disney</a> Co.'s Disney+.</p> <p>Advances in artificial intelligence could also reorganize the digital playing field. The ChatGPT chatbot released last year, which can produce plausible-sounding answers to an array of questions, has been lauded by some industry observers as an eventual alternative to current search engines like Google, even though the program can sometimes make factual errors. OpenAI, which makes the chatbot, among other tools, is currently in talks to sell existing shares in an offer that would value the company at around \$29 billion, <a href="#">roughly double</a> a prior offer completed in 2021, the Journal reported earlier this month.</p>



## Tougher regulation

These challenges are coming to a head at the same time that tech regulation, long an amorphous and looming threat largely ignored by investors, has started to take a significant bite, too. European Union regulators earlier this month [struck down Meta's legal justification](#) for its highly targeted ads. That is leaving the company scrambling for a way to keep showing ads targeted based on its Facebook and Instagram users' online activity in the bloc.

The EU is also [starting to implement](#) two other new laws it passed last year—over objections from big tech companies—aimed at ensuring they give more of an opening to smaller competitors, and forcing them to more heavily police content on their platforms.

Even though companies subject to the Digital Markets Act—the law focused on tech competition—won't be officially named until later this year, and its provisions won't be enforced until 2024, the law is already pushing companies to change their business practices. [Apple](#) Inc., for instance, is now preparing to let applications be downloaded onto iPhones and iPads [outside its App Store](#), something the company had long said would compromise security, to comply with the law.

Amazon recently promised to give better treatment and prominence to [third-party sellers](#) in ways a company executive said were meant to comply with the new law, as part of its settlement of an antitrust lawsuit in Europe.

Other provisions of the law include a ban on a company with a search function giving priority in its results for its own products and tools over those from other companies—a provision that could require changes to how Google operates in the bloc—and a mandate that messaging apps from digital giants must allow smaller rivals to interoperate with them. That could cut into Apple's [walled-garden approach](#) to its Messages app on iPhones.

Big tech companies have been moderating their tone on regulation, saying they plan to comply with the new laws.

“We're now hard at work exploring new processes and product changes to comply fully,” a spokesman at Google says. “For us, it's key to keep a constructive, hands-on regulatory dialogue with the European Commission for many months to come.”

Apple and Amazon declined to comment. A Meta spokesperson pointed to a statement from [Mark Zuckerberg](#) on a recent earnings call: “I believe the tougher prioritization, discipline and efficiency that we're driving across the organization will help us navigate the current environment and emerge an even stronger company.”

What happens in the EU in the coming year could end up being a template for other parts of the world now considering legislation with some similar provisions, including the U.K. and India.

“The looming [Digital Markets Act] is already having an impact,” says Anne Witt, a law professor at the EDHEC Business School's Augmented Law Institute, based in Lille, France. “If the pressure piles up internationally, sooner or later it may make sense for these companies to align their behavior globally.”

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## Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/17 Taliban start buying Twitter blue tick
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64294613">https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64294613</a>
GIST	The Taliban have started using Twitter's paid-for verification feature, meaning some now have blue ticks on their accounts.



Previously, the blue tick indicated "active, notable, and authentic accounts of public interest" verified by Twitter, and could not be purchased.

But now, users can buy them through the new Twitter Blue service.

At least two Taliban officials and four prominent supporters in Afghanistan are currently using the checkmarks.

Hedayatullah Hedayat, the head of the Taliban's department for "access to information", now has the tick. His account has 187,000 followers and he regularly posts information related to the Taliban administration. He had his paid-for blue tick removed last month, according to local media, but it has now returned.

Abdul Haq Hammad, head of the media watchdog at the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture, also has a blue tick on his account that has 170,000 followers.

Prominent Taliban supporters have acquired the blue tick too.

Muhammad Jalal, who previously identified as a Taliban official, praised the new owner of Twitter on Monday, declaring that Elon Musk was "making Twitter great again".

The presence of the hard-line Islamists on Twitter has been a topic of controversy for some time.

In October 2021, former US President Donald Trump - who was suspended from the platform after his supporters stormed the US Capitol - said: "We live in a world where the Taliban has a huge presence on Twitter, yet your favorite American President has been silenced.

"This is unacceptable."

The Twitter Blue service was introduced in December.

It costs \$8 per month, and an increased fee of \$11 is paid by those using the Twitter app on Apple devices. Subscribers to Twitter Blue benefit from "priority ranking in search, mentions, and replies" to help fight spam and bots, [according to the platform](#).

Before the introduction of Twitter Blue, none of the observed accounts for Taliban officials carried the blue tick mark - that was then used to indicate the identities of users verified by Twitter.

After their return to power in Kabul in August 2021, the group took over verified accounts run by the previous administration, including the Afghanistan Cricket Board. The sporting body's account now carries a gold tick.

Under Twitter's new policies, gold checkmarks indicate businesses, while grey ones are for other users, such as governing authorities.

Taliban officials and supporters are prolific users of Twitter, using the platform to disseminate key messages.

Twitter did not respond to a request for comment.

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HEADLINE	01/17 UNSC lists Abdul Rehman Makki a terrorist
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay?newsID=1040589">https://www.daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay?newsID=1040589</a>

GIST	<p><b>New Delhi, Jan 17 (IANS):</b> The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) listed Pakistan-based Abdul Rehman Makki, as a global terrorist under the 1267 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al Qaida Sanctions Committee on Monday.</p> <p>Makki was declared a terrorist by the Government of India on October 27, 2020 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.</p> <p>Since then, China has been obstructing the proposal of the U.S. and India to declare him as a global terrorist in the UNSC.</p> <p>India had demanded the same in the UNSC last year. The proposal was blocked by China in June, 2022.</p> <p>According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, Makki, born on December 10, 1954, in Pakistan, is the head of the Political Affairs Wing and of the Foreign Relations Department of LeT.</p> <p>Makki, LeT's Deputy Chief, is involved in collecting funds for the terror outfit.</p> <p>He is a close relative of LeT Chief Hafiz Mohammad Saeed and the organisation's Deputy Chief.</p> <p>He was the mastermind behind seven attacks in India including the attack on Red Fort in 2000.</p> <p>His other major terror attacks in India include the Rampur camp attack in 2008, Baramulla, Srinagar and Bandipora attacks in 2018, as well as the assassination of well-known Kashmiri editor Shujat Bhukari in the same year.</p> <p>LeT was behind the November 26, 2008 Mumbai attack.</p> <p>According to the MHA, Makki was also involved in planning an IED blast inside the Odeon Theatre in Hyderabad on May 7, 2006.</p> <p>The U.S. government has announced a reward of \$ 2million on Makki.</p> <p>The U.S. and India had declared Makki a terrorist under their laws prior to the UNSC's decision.</p> <p>In 2019, the Government of Pakistan arrested Makki for carrying out terror incidents.</p> <p>Later in 2020, a court in Pakistan held Makki guilty of terror funding.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Threats to Quebec premier: violent trend</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://ca.news.yahoo.com/threats-against-quebecs-premier-during-020024714.html">https://ca.news.yahoo.com/threats-against-quebecs-premier-during-020024714.html</a>
GIST	<p>Online threats against Quebec's premier during the COVID-19 pandemic are part of a larger and "increasingly violent" trend, according to an unclassified report that concludes it's difficult for law enforcement and intelligence agencies to assess the validity of those threats.</p> <p>The report, by Canada's Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre (ITAC), was obtained by CBC News through an access to information request. ITAC works in tandem with Canada's top spy agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS).</p> <p>It was written in response to threats made online in January 2022, shortly after Premier François Legault proposed an <a href="#">additional tax for the unvaccinated</a>.</p> <p>The report says Legault's home address was posted on a public online forum, among other threatening messages.</p> <p>"Hopefully someone in Quebec decapitates that f---," said one anonymous message.</p>

"Give yourself at least a few weeks for a clean plan so that you don't get caught," said another.

In the report, ITAC concludes that violence against Legault is "unlikely" but says it "cannot discount the possibility" of an attack against the premier.

It also warns that the practice of "doxing" — maliciously publishing personal information online — adds risk, because it "provides those who have the intent and capability to use violence with valuable logistical details, potentially resulting in an opportunity to conduct an attack."

Legault's office declined to be interviewed, saying it doesn't comment on security concerns.

But one former security expert with the federal government said doxing adds an extra layer of danger into the "toxic brew" of violent online comments.

"It does heighten the risk for specific individuals and specific institutions and communities," said Artur Wilczynski, who is now a senior strategy adviser with consulting firm Samuel Associates in Ottawa. "It is a significant concern."

### **Threats against officials are up during pandemic**

The ITAC report is part of mounting evidence of polarization, according to Amarnath Amarasingam, an assistant professor at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., whose research interests include terrorism, radicalization and extremism.

"The pandemic really ramped up the temperature of the discourse," he said in an interview with CBC News.

"Everything became a cosmic struggle of good versus evil and us versus them — and bringing down that temperature of politics is going to be enormously important."

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, threats against elected officials in Quebec have skyrocketed.

Provincial police received [more than 200 complaints of threats against politicians in 2022](#), compared with 16 in 2019.

At least five people have been charged since the beginning of the pandemic with threatening Legault. Canada's top spy agency has also raised the alarm.

Speaking to parliamentarians last May, a CSIS representative warned of a "[marked increase in violent threats addressed at elected officials and public servants](#)," saying it has allocated more resources to monitor the rise of ideologically motivated violent extremism.

Federal politicians have also been targeted. In August, [Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland was harassed](#) in Grande Prairie, Alta.

"The chatter online has increased exponentially, and we saw it kind of happening in real time, since exactly March 2020, when the [pandemic] mandates set in," Amarasingam said.

"It's difficult to know how many of these people will act on their words. Because they make threats all the time, but it only takes one to act on it."

### **Heated political climate has 'chilling effect'**

Above and beyond the risks for the targeted lawmakers, the pro-democracy group Apathy is Boring warns that the current political climate will make it harder to convince people to enter politics.

	<p>"It does really have a chilling effect, particularly for women, people of colour, younger candidates," said Sam Reusch, the non-partisan's group's executive director.</p> <p>There's no "silver bullet" or clear way to cool the political climate, she said, but her organization does work with youth to help identify their biases and online misinformation.</p> <p>"We really need to be doing the work of reaching out to one another, of mending our communities, of reducing polarization by having hard conversations and not allowing it to fracture," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/17 Dutch arrest suspected IS security chief</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/world/dutch-police-arrest/YNDGJ5JGRPWP7EIS76QE6YDO4/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/world/dutch-police-arrest/YNDGJ5JGRPWP7EIS76QE6YDO4/</a>
GIST	<p>THE HAGUE, Netherlands — (AP) — Dutch authorities arrested a Syrian man on Tuesday who is suspected of having been a security chief for the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra extremist groups during Syria's grinding civil war, prosecutors said.</p> <p>"It is suspected that from his position at IS he also contributed to the war crimes that the organization committed in Syria," the National Public Prosecutor's Office said in a statement.</p> <p>The 37-year-old man, whose name wasn't released, was detained in the small village of Arkel, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of the port city of Rotterdam, prosecutors said in a statement.</p> <p>The man is suspected of holding "a managerial position in the security service of IS" from 2015-2018, prosecutors said. For two years prior to that, he allegedly carried out the same work for Jabhat al-Nusra. Prosecutors say he held both functions "in and around the Yarmouk refugee camp" south of the Syrian capital, Damascus.</p> <p>The suspect applied for asylum in the Netherlands in 2019 and later settled in Arkel, prosecutors said. He was scheduled to appear before an examining magistrate in The Hague on Feb. 20.</p> <p>It wasn't the first time Dutch authorities arrested a suspect from the Syrian conflict. Last year, a Dutch court <a href="#">convicted two Syrian brothers</a> of holding senior roles in Jabhat al-Nusra between 2011 and 2014.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Narratives: targeted killing of ISIS leaders</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/how-the-targeted-killing-of-isis-leaders-revives-the-terror-groups-ideology/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/how-the-targeted-killing-of-isis-leaders-revives-the-terror-groups-ideology/</a>
GIST	<p>Despite losing its leaders as a result of U.S. Special Forces "decapitation" strikes over the past three years, the Islamic State nevertheless has markedly bolstered its ideological appeal in the jihadi world by successfully leveraging the Islamic doctrine of Martyrdom (Shaheed) and the IS third global pledge (Bay'ah) campaign. Indeed, there is a paradoxical situation: with the frequent targeted killings of ISIS caliphs, the recruitment of local followers has noticeably increased and the "breakout capacity" of IS branches has strengthened in Central Asia (ISKP), Central Africa (ISCAP) and West Africa (ISWAP).</p> <p>The past three years have been rich in events in the history of the Islamic State during which its Shura Council proclaimed its leaders as the "Amir al-Mu'minin" (Amir of the Faithful) four times. The story began on October 26, 2019, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the first caliph of ISIS, blew himself up during a U.S. special forces raid on his compound in the Syrian province of Idlib. Three days after, the Islamic State's <a href="#">al-Furqan Media released</a> a lengthy speech from its spokesman, Abu Hamza al-Qurashi, in which Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was glorified as the "God-fearing Amir al-Mu'mineen and Caliph of the Muslims sacrificing himself on the path of Allah." According to al-Furqan Media, "God Almighty determined for him to be killed in His path, and he was steadfast on his religion, going forth and not turning back in flight." The IS official spokesman also announced the appointment of a certain Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi (a.k.a. Haji Abdullah Qardash or Abu Ibrahim) as the new "commander of the believers and Caliph of the Muslims."</p>

Sixteen months later, on February 3, 2022, [IS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi was killed](#) in a U.S. counterterrorism raid in Idlib province in northwestern Syria. According to the [U.S. Department of Defense](#), IS' second caliph killed himself and members of his family by triggering an explosive device to avoid capture during a raid by the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command. The group's spokesman [Abu Omar al-Muhajir in his speech in al-Furqan Media](#) eulogized IS' second leader as the "Mujahid, Sheikh, worshipping Caliph, Amir al-Mu'mineen and great leader who gave his life for Allah."

On March 10, 2022, after a month of mourning for Abu Ibrahim, as is customary in Islam, the ISIS top Shura [named Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi](#) (Abu al-Hassan) as the third caliph and the "Amir al-Muminin" ("Emir of the Faithful"). His reign lasted only eight months, the shortest period in the history of the Islamic State. On November 30, 2022, IS spokesman Abu Omar al-Muhajir announced that Islamic State leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi had been killed in the battle without revealing any specific details. Hours after the announcement, [CENTCOM confirmed](#) his killing, adding that it had occurred in Daraa province, in southern Syria, in mid-October at the hands of "the Free Syrian Army" (FSA).

Thus, IS caliph Abu al-Hassan was killed in an operation without U.S. involvement. However, [IS spokesman al-Muhajir](#) described the slain caliph Abu al-Hassan as "God's soldier who fought in the path of Allah and sacrificed his life and properties in order to gain Paradise," quoting the Quranic surah of "At-Tawba". Further, al-Muhajir also announced that the IS Shura Council named Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi (Abu al-Hussein), an unknown figure in the jihadi world, the new (fourth) caliph of the Islamic State.

### **A Premature Celebration of ISIS Collapse**

Following the brilliant U.S. counterterror operations resulting in the targeted killing of ISIS and al-Qaeda leaders, Western society harbored excessive hopes for the accelerated collapse of the notorious transnational Salafi-Jihadi terrorist groups. This news became the main event on a global scale and the engine of domestic political processes. The targeted killing of ISIS' first caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was triumphantly announced personally by former [President Donald Trump](#), saying, "At my direction, as commander-in-chief of the U.S., we obliterated ISIS caliphate, 100 percent." Following this tradition, on February 3, 2022, President Biden released a [brief statement](#) and then delivered [remarks to the American people](#) on how U.S. forces successfully carried out a counterterror operation that resulted in the targeted killing of second IS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi in northwest Syria.

However, the bitter truth is that the Islamic State's demise, foretold after the targeting killing of its leaders, has often been premature. The targeted killings of the Islamic State's founder, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in October 2019 and his successors, Abu Ibrahim and Abu al-Hasan, in 2022 also did not hasten the collapse of the movement by "100 percent". On the contrary, the Islamic State and its local branches (provinces) have shown a stubborn struggle for ideological revival and peculiar survivability during the leadership transition.

Undoubtedly, targeted killings or "decapitation strikes" against leaders of ISIS and al-Qaeda are important in U.S. counterterrorism. However, the ideological revival of the Islamic State and the increased combat capability of its local provinces (wilayats) again raise questions about the impacts and effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies that target transnational Salafi-Jihadi terrorist groups. Analysis of ISIS activities over the past three years has revealed that its media strategists have successfully exploited targeted killings of its caliphs and frequent leadership transitions to inspire support and loyalty among affiliates around the world.

After a series of losses of its leaders, the Islamic State is promoting narratives that the IS caliphs are ordinary Mujahideen and simple warriors of Allah, fighting against the enemy of Islam. According to the pro-IS Salafi scholars, the death of the Caliph does not lead to the decline of the Caliphate, but only ignites hope for the irreversible victory of the Islamic Ummah. Developing this notion, the Islamic State's [al-Naba Media claims](#) that the Caliph is not a king who does not leave his throne, surrounded by servants and courtiers who come and go with all kinds of pleasures. "In fact, the caliphs wage jihad and willingly accept death in the path of Allah, just as the Rashidun caliphs Omar was killed with a dagger, Uthman was cut with swords, and 'Ali was struck with a sword. In the same way, IS's last three caliphs were killed,

their body parts scattered in defense of the religion.” Such a narrative of the late three IS caliphs serves as an ideological stimulant for IS supporters.

ISIS not only survived the targeted killings of its leaders, but it continued to regroup and become more of a threat with the growth of its external “provinces” (wilayat) in Afghanistan and Pakistan (ISKP), Nigeria (ISWAP), Mozambique (ISCAP), Sinai Peninsula (ISSP) and Philippines (ISEAP). The Islamic State seeks to compensate for the loss of its “territorial caliphate” and the frequent targeted killings of its leaders by [spreading violent Salafi ideology](#) to keep its global project thriving. So long as IS thrives in its external provinces, the dream of the global caliphate remains alive.

### **The Islamic State’s Third Bay’ah Campaign**

The most important ISIS tactic in its leadership transition is its [global Bay’ah \(pledges of allegiance\) campaign](#) to the new Caliph indicating a persistent global jihadist threat. On November 30, 2022, according to its ideological strategy, the Islamic State launched a new global bay’ah campaign to its fourth caliph, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Qurashi. Since then, from December until now, [heavy pledges of allegiance](#) to ISIS’ new leader have been flooding in from its provinces across the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South Asia.

To be more precise, [fifteen IS affiliates and pro-IS groups](#) have already pledged allegiance to the new caliph: Iraq and Syria (IS-Iraq and al-Sham), IS-Yemen Province, Afghanistan and post-Soviet Central Asia (ISKP), West Africa (ISWAP), Central Africa (ISCAP), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (IS-DRC), IS-Sahel Province (ISGS), IS-Mozambique (IS-M), IS-Libya Province, IS-Somalia Province, Philippines (ISEAP), Pakistan (ISPP), India (ISHP), IS-Sinai Province, IS-Caucasus Province. According to [SITE Intelligence Group](#), which tracks jihadi media, ISIS operatives and supporters from at least 30 countries have rushed headlong into the Islamic State’s bay’ah campaign. Not surprisingly, the Islamic State’s bay’ah campaign is still in the headlines of jihadi social media outlets profusely publishing photos and videos of IS militants pledging allegiance to the new so-called “Amir al-Muminin”.

Undoubtedly, the Islamic State’s theatrical bay’ah campaign is ideologically inspiring its local provinces, hardline Takfiri outfits and pro-IS Salafi jihadists around the world cementing their loyalty to the Caliphate as a proto-state project. IS ideologues used photos and videos from the Islamic State’s third global pledge campaign to demonstrate the group’s steadfastness after the targeted killing of its caliph. The Islamic State’s bay’ah campaign also provides an opportunity for IS-Central to assert to current and future provinces that it is a unified and expanding global Caliphate.

### **Are ISIS’ Caliphs Really Martyrs?**

In response to the targeted killing of its leaders, Islamic State’s official speaker through the group’s media arms, usually al-Hayat Media Center and al-Furqan Media, glorify its fallen leaders emphasizing the sacred significance of martyrs (Shaheed). Further, IS’ spokesperson called on the Caliphate warriors [to avenge the targeted killings of late IS leaders](#) in order to exaggerate the strength and cohesion of the group. After targeted killings of its leaders, IS strategists struggle to revive the Islamic State’s harsh Salafi-Jihadi ideology (al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya) through the Islamic doctrinal concept of Shaheed (martyrdom), to which jihadi insurgents are firmly committed. The cult of Shaheed contributes to turning the late IS leaders killed in targeted attacks into a subject of ideological inspiration.

In official statements about the targeted killings of its caliphs, IS claimed that they all martyred on the jihadi battlefield while fighting the enemies of Islam. IS ideologists seek to exploit the myth of shaheed to lead by example, energize their followers and recruit new supporters. The IS propaganda machine manipulated the Shaheed concept to suit its needs. Although the term shaheed in the Qur’an refers exclusively to a legal or eyewitness, modern Salafi-Jihadi ideologies exploit it extensively to denote martyrs who died for their Islamic faith or in the defense of their nation, family, and property.

Announcing the death of IS’s third caliph Abu al-Hassan, [Islamic State’s al-Furqan Media said](#) that “he sacrificed his peace of mind, his soul, and his property for the sake of Allah.” Further, the editorial quoted Surah At-Tawba from the Quran: “Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties in exchange for that they will have Paradise.” It is noteworthy that, exploiting the examples of



its late caliphs, the Islamic State seeks to inspire its followers to sacrifice their lives and properties for sake of Islam in order to earn the mercy of Allah Almighty and enter Paradise.

According to Islam, even the [clothes of a martyr acquire a sacred value](#). A Shaheed who fell on the battlefield should be buried in the same clothes without washing him or not wrapping in a shroud. Intentionally leaving traces of martyrdom on the body, Islam elevates the role and significance of the martyr who sacrificed his life “in the path of Allah and Islam.” Perhaps, ISIS’ third caliph Abu al-Hassan was buried according to the Martyrdom canons in Syrian Daraa province, while nothing was left from the bodies of first and second IS caliphs, al-Baghdadi and Abu Ibrahim, after the explosions.

In conclusion, the targeted killings of IS leaders over the past three years have catalyzed the ideological revival of its provinces, as the victims were heroized as martyrs. ISIS has strategically developed ideological narratives around the fame, charisma, and selflessness of the “martyred” caliphs, and then used those myths to recruit new supporters and expand its provinces. Analysis suggests that the targeted killing of IS leaders could have an impact on reducing ISIS’ capabilities and violence, but on the other hand, it provides food for the glorification of its murdered leaders for the flourishing of its violent ideology.

Therefore, it would be preferable for the U.S. counterterrorism forces and their strategic partners to capture the top leaders of IS and al-Qaeda to deprive them of the opportunity to manipulate inspiring religious narratives. Indeed, capturing is often preferred to targeted killings. Unlike martyrs, captive caliphs do not have sacred value and cannot influence the revival of ISIS ideology. But one can assume that the Islamic State will continue to rely on the Islamic concept of Shaheed and its bay’ah campaigns for a long time to survive after each targeted killing of its leaders.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 ISIS, regional affiliates still pervasive threat</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-and-its-regional-affiliates-remain-persistent-and-pervasive-threat-worldwide/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-and-its-regional-affiliates-remain-persistent-and-pervasive-threat-worldwide/</a>
GIST	<p>ISIS and its regional affiliates continued to threaten regional and global security in 2022. They have opportunistically aimed to <a href="#">take advantage of</a> recent trends worldwide since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2019. First, ISIS-affiliated groups saw the Taliban’s takeover in 2021 as a success story of jihadism. They considered it a model to achieve their goals in the fight against the western world. Second, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has changed the world agenda, and it has become a priority for the West to support Ukraine. Overfocusing on Ukraine has created opportunities for ISIS-affiliated groups to operate securely in the jihadist regions. Third, the retreat of western troops from the areas where jihadist groups have been active has resulted in security vacuums. These groups have successfully operated under the weakness of current local governments. Fourth, the prison breaks provided opportunities for ISIS militants in 2022. For example, ISIS <a href="#">targeted</a> the al-Sina prison in the al-Hasakah region in Syria. The eight-day battle recorded the death of 500 people; about three-quarters of them were ISIS militants. Although ISIS failed and lost many militants in its prison break attempt, it showed the group’s capacity to fight in multi-day battles.</p> <p>Among the jihadist groups, ISIS occupies a significant place where the group controlled territory in Iraq and Syria and successfully achieved its goals of establishing a de facto state and ruling around six million people in the Middle East. At its peak in 2014 and 2015, ISIS was able to recruit more than 30,000 fighters from more than 90 countries, generating yearly revenue of around \$2 billion and running a social media operation including more than 10,000 Twitter accounts. The United States’ counterterrorism strategies effectively weakened and confined ISIS in Iraq and Syria, where the organization lost most of its territory and militants. Furthermore, its leaders were killed in U.S. counterterrorism operations. Nevertheless, the organization continued to face critical challenges in 2022. The group’s leader, Abu Ibrahim al Hashimi al Qurayshi, was killed on February 3, 2022, the successor of ISIS’s most influential and charismatic leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was killed in a U.S. military operation in 2019. Additionally, U.S. officials <a href="#">killed</a> two top group leaders in an airstrike on October 6, 2022. Losing territory and decapitating its leaders have deeply impacted capacity. (As seen in Figure 1 below), the number of ISIS-claimed</p>



attacks continued to drop over the years, and it was a more than 100 percent decrease between 2018 and 2022.

Despite decreasing the number of ISIS-claimed attacks and reducing its capacity, ISIS-Core in Iraq and Syria managed to continue its attacks. The year 2022 [recorded](#) spikes in ISIS activities and fears of its returns in Deir Ez-Zohr. The group intensified most of its operations in the areas held by autonomous administrations after the humanity and security campaign [carried out](#) by the Internal Security Forces of North and East Syria (Asayish) and U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in Hawl Camp in Hasakkah Governorate in September 2022. The campaign arrested 226 individuals, including 36 women suspected of belonging to ISIS cells.

In 2022, ISIS [claimed](#) responsibility for more than 100 attacks, most of which targeted SDF members and the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) employees in Syria. Moreover, ISIS continued to demand that people in the region pay zakat, an obligatory payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property used for charitable and religious purposes. The group punished an investor and burnt his oil well after his refusal to pay zakat. Similarly, ISIS militants [blew up](#) a currency exchange office after the owner refused to pay zakat in October 2022.

On the other hand, the organization's legacy has influenced its regional branches, which have continued to threaten regional and global security in Asia and Africa. For example, ISIS-K's attacks increased in Afghanistan and [spread](#) to nearby countries such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Almost every month in 2022, at least one or two ISIS-K attacks targeting Afghan Shia mosques were recorded. The group also conducted raids on Sunni mosques representing Sufi Islam and disapproving of ISIS's brutal ideology. ISIS-K's 2022 attacks proved that the group has the capacity to deploy suicide bombers, exert its influence in almost all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, maintain an organizational structure that includes global jihadists, and carry out attacks in Afghanistan's neighboring countries. ISIS-K's 2022 high performance shows that the group may replace ISIS-Core and can be more threatening to regional and global security.

Africa occupies a special place for ISIS, which has increased its capacity and popularity. It has been a trend to see the involvement of Muslim communities that are exposed to political, economic, and social grievances and feel marginalized and discriminated against in jihadist groups. These communities that have formed local jihadist groups to defend their rights have competed to be predominantly under the banner of ISIS. Figure 2 below shows the number of ISIS-claimed attacks by region. While three percent of ISIS attacks happened in Africa in 2018, it accounted for 29 percent in 2021 and 45 percent in the first ten months of 2022.

In 2022, ISIS's branches in the Sahel region, Nigeria, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were active and significantly threatened regional security. ISIS-Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), formed in 2015 as a split within the militant group Al-Mourabitoun, is the ISIS branch in the Sahel that predominantly operates in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The group killed 600 people in Niger in 2021 and continued to target UN peacekeeping missions, the Movement for Azawad Salvation (MSA) and the Imghad Tuareg and Allies Self-Defense Group (GATIA) as well as JNIM group in its attacks in 2022.

ISIS-GS [killed](#) more than 400 civilians in its fight against MSA and GATIA in Burkina Faso in the first half of 2022. The same period [recorded](#) the attacks of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), an al Qaeda-affiliated group operating in the Sahel, in 10 out of 13 regions of Burkina Faso, but ISIS-GS's attacks were deadlier, killing nearly twice as many people.

Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) is the ISIS branch in Nigeria that is primarily active in the Chad basin. The group is the offshoot of Boko Haram, which has a violent rivalry. The most prominent and charismatic leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, killed himself in an ISWAP raid in 2021. The organization was one of the top 10 terrorist groups with the most fatalities in 2020, [killing](#) 982 people. ISWAP continued to make attacks in Niger, Chad, and Nigeria and intensified its activities in Cameroon in 2022. Using hearts-and-minds policies, the group aims to get the sympathy of Muslim communities and selectively targets state officials and Christian communities. In 2022, the group conducted many attacks

and targeted the Nigerian military. ISWAP [killed](#) nine soldiers in one of those attacks on November 20, 2022.

Islamic State in Mozambique (ISIS-M) is another active ISIS branch in Africa. Aware of what it means to get recruits, funding, and popularity, Ansar al-Sunna, who fought for Muslim grievances in northern Cabo Del Gado, pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2017 and has begun to use the ISIS-M group name. The group was able to conduct attacks in Tanzania in 2021. Interestingly, the group's common tactic is beheadings, being [listed](#) as one of the top 10 organizations with the most beheading cases. In 2022, ISIS-M kept its momentum and was actively involved in terrorist attacks in the region.

Islamic State in DRC has been another active group in Africa. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which is an armed group primarily engaged in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has declared loyalty to and operates under the banner of ISIS. The group conducted attacks in Uganda in 2021 and continued to do its terrorist activities in DRC in 2022.

To conclude, ISIS does not get the western focus as it did when the organization controlled territory and perpetrated violent attacks in the mid-2010s. Terrorism databases have reported a decreasing number of ISIS attacks worldwide; however, the organization has exerted influence in conflict zones, Asia, and Africa. ISIS is the organization with the most regional branches. Several have faded into obscurity and recently have not been involved in notable terrorist attacks. Still, its branches in Afghanistan, the Sahel region, DRC, and Mozambique have been actively engaged in terrorist attacks. It should be noted that ISIS-Core in Iraq and Syria lost its last three leaders over the previous three years. However, the group is still capable of attempting to control territory in Deir Zohr and is involved in prison breaks with the involvement of several hundreds of its militants and using highly complex weapons. ISIS-K's 2022 performance in Afghanistan and its capacity to do attacks in neighboring countries as well as ISWAP, ISIS-GS, and ISIS-M's regional attacks seem to be alarming for regional and global security and indicate that the world will continue to experience ISIS attacks in the following years.

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HEADLINE	01/16 UN: AQ, IS driving insecurity in Mali
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/al-qaida-islamic-state-driving-insecurity-mali-96472022">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/al-qaida-islamic-state-driving-insecurity-mali-96472022</a>
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS -- Al-Qaida and Islamic State extremist groups are driving insecurity in central Mali and continue to clash near populated areas in the northern Gao and Menaka regions, the U.N. chief said in a new report circulated Monday.</p> <p>Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said “the level and frequency of incidents of violence remain exceptionally high,” with attacks by “violent extremist groups” against civilians accounting for the majority of documented human rights abuses.</p> <p>“The attacks carried out against civilians by terrorist groups, the battle for influence among them and the violent activities conducted by community militias remain a chilling daily reality, as do the attacks against the Malian Defense and Security Forces and against MINUSMA,” the U.N. peacekeeping force, he said.</p> <p>Guterres said in the report to the U.N. Security Council that “going forward, military operations to combat the extremist groups will continue to be a crucial component for the restoration of security.”</p> <p>In central Mali, he said, the extremists are capitalizing on intercommunal conflicts to expand their influence and secure new recruits.</p> <p>In the northern Gao and Menaka regions, Guterres said fighters from the al-Qaida affiliate Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin known as JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara also continue to clash, causing civilian casualties and thousands to flee the violence.</p>

He said the number of people displaced in Mali increased from 397,000 to 442,620 as of October, with some 1,950 schools closed affecting over 587,000 children. Humanitarian assistance is reaching only 2.5 million people of the 5.3 million in need, he said.

The secretary-general stressed that the ultimate success against the extremist groups will hinge of whether the operations are accompanied by efforts “to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, foster social cohesion, address structural fragility and deliver basic services.”

Mali has struggled to contain an Islamic extremist insurgency since 2012. Extremist rebels were forced from power in Mali’s northern cities with the help of a French-led military operation, but they regrouped in the desert and began launching attacks on the Malian army and its allies. Insecurity has worsened with attacks on civilians and U.N. peacekeepers.

In August 2020, Mali’s president was overthrown in a coup that included Assimi Goita, then an army colonel. In June 2021, Goita was sworn in as president of a transitional government after carrying out his second coup in nine months. France, Mali’s former colonial power, pulled out the last of thousands of French forces in August 2022 amid acrimonious exchanges with the transitional government.

In late 2021, Goita reportedly decided to allow the deployment of Russia’s Wagner group, a private military contractor with ties to the Kremlin that is also operating in Ukraine to support Moscow’s troops in the 11-month war.

The report does not name Wagner, but says MINUSMA “documented violations of international humanitarian and human rights law allegedly committed during military operations conducted by the Malian armed forces, accompanied by foreign security personnel and dozogs,” who are traditional hunters.

It says the U.N. force also documented “some instances in which foreign security personnel appear to have committed violations of human rights and international humanitarian law while conducting both air and ground military operations in the center of the country.”

On the political front, Mali’s presidential election which had been scheduled for February 2022 is now slated to take place in February 2024.

Guterres pointed to progress in putting a single electoral management body into operation and the submission of a preliminary draft constitution. He urged authorities to expedite implementation of the electoral timetable published in July 2022.

Equally important to Mali’s lasting stabilization, he said, is implementation of the 2015 peace agreement signed by three parties — the government, a coalition of groups called the Coordination of Movements of Azawad that includes ethnic Arabs and Tuaregs who seek autonomy in northern Mali, and a pro-government militia known as the Platform.

“However,” Guterres said, “the recent decision by the movements to suspend their participation in the implementation process is cause for serious concern.”

The secretary-general stressed that the primary responsibility for moving the peace process forward lies with the parties, and he urged them “to engage constructively with each other and the international mediation team to overcome the current hurdles.”

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HEADLINE	01/16 Iraq PM defends continued US presence
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.dawn.com/news/1731899/iraqi-pm-defends-continued-us-troop-presence">https://www.dawn.com/news/1731899/iraqi-pm-defends-continued-us-troop-presence</a>
GIST	WASHINGTON: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani has defended the open-ended presence of US and other foreign troops in his country, in his first US interview since taking office in October, published on Sunday.

“We think that we need the foreign forces,” Sudani told *The Wall Street Journal*.

US and Nato forces have been training Iraqi soldiers on how to fight the militant Islamic State (IS) group.

Elimination of IS needs some more time, the prime minister added.

His comments are significant as the parties that back him and control parliament are aligned with pro-Iranian factions and very hostile to the US. Iraq also depends on Iran for natural gas and electricity.

The United States has about 2,000 troops stationed in Iraq to train and advise Iraqi forces. Nato has several hundred troops there, also in a non-combat role.

In the interview, Mr Sudani made clear he wants to get along with the United States, which is locked in confrontation with Iran.

He said he would like to send a high-level delegation to Washington soon, perhaps as a prelude to meeting with President Joe Biden.

PM Sudani said Iraq wants to have good relations with both the United States and Iran. “We strive for that,” he said.

“I don’t see this as an impossible matter, to see Iraq have a good relationship with Iran and the US.”

He also faces a populace hit hard by an economic crisis and eager for a better life. His visit to Tehran in late November was marked by promises of stronger cooperation on economic and security matters.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Somalia captures 2 towns from militants</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-forces-capture-two-towns-from-militants/6920089.html">https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-forces-capture-two-towns-from-militants/6920089.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON/BELEDWEYNE — The Somali government reported on Monday that government forces have captured two towns previously controlled by militant group al-Shabab in the central Galmudug State.</p> <p>Defense Minister Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur told VOA Somali that government forces and local fighters seized Harardhere and Galcad after the militants fled without a fight.</p> <p>Harardhere is a key coastal town and a former pirate hub. It was the biggest and most strategic town in Galmudug that was still in the hands of al-Shabab until Monday.</p> <p>“Today, it’s a big day for the Somali people, it’s a victory for the Somalis,” Nur said. “We have succeeded in taking control of Galcad and Harardhere districts.”</p> <p>He said Somali government forces were leading the operation to seize both towns with support from regional and local fighters.</p> <p>Nur said Harardhere is largely empty and accused al-Shabab of “displacing” the civilians from the town before government troops arrived. Business places are closed down, he said.</p> <p>He said the government will work on returning the residents to the town.</p> <p>The capture of Galcad, about 375 kilometers north of Mogadishu, and Harardhere indicates the government-led offensive against al-Shabab in central Somalia is progressing.</p>

	<p>The government has reported killing hundreds of militants and seizing dozens of localities in neighboring Hirshabelle state since the military operations were launched in August.</p> <p>The government has also reported shutting down hundreds of bank and mobile money accounts allegedly linked with al-Shabab in an effort to curtail the group's revenue generation activities.</p> <p>Al-Shabab – known for imposing a harsh, punitive brand of Islam in the areas it controls -- has fought back with suicide bombings and retaliatory attacks. An explosion from a suicide car bomb hit a building housing a security officer in Halgan village, Hiran region on Monday. a police official told VOA Somali.</p> <p>Colonel Hassan Kaafi Mohamed Ibrahim, a deputy police commander in Hiran region confirmed that the explosion killed Jamal Ahmed Jama, a captain with the local security forces.</p> <p>Jama was a government officer who was also involved in the local force mobilization against al-Shabab, reports say.</p> <p>Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the suicide car bombing in Halgan, 260 kilometers north of Mogadishu.</p> <p>The group also said it has inflicted "heavy losses" through other recent suicide bombings.</p> <p>Al-Shabab was behind three explosions in Hiran region's Bulobarde and Jalalaqsi towns on Saturday, killing 13 people and wounding over 50 other people, according to local officials.</p> <p>On January 4, more than 20 people, a majority of them civilians, were killed in two explosions from vehicle-borne explosive devices in Mahaas town, in the eastern part of the Hiran region.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 US 'recalibrates' strategy approach in Africa</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.defenceweek.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/in-africa-the-us-is-recalibrating-to-counter-drivers-of-instability/">https://www.defenceweek.co.za/joint/diplomacy-a-peace/in-africa-the-us-is-recalibrating-to-counter-drivers-of-instability/</a>
GIST	<p>"The US has recalibrated its approach. We will not only seek to empower the African continent in the field of security, development, and governance, but we will also strive to help them address the drivers of instability and conflict to meet the ambition and promise of Africa."</p> <p>This is according to Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for African Affairs, Chidi Blyden, who was speaking in Washington in December.</p> <p>She explained how US-Africa security ties are being revamped, with the recent US-Africa summit being one way to understand African challenges. "For my work at the Department of Defence, our newly released National Defence Strategy prioritizes three areas of engagement: countering violent extremist organizations, strengthening and enabling allies and partners to support mutual security objectives, and addressing targeted strategic competition concerns that would have negative ramifications for the US and our partners."</p> <p>Through the recently launched US Strategy Towards Sub-Saharan Africa, "This Africa strategy will refocus US through four lines of effort: delivering democratic and security dividends, advancing pandemic recovery and economic opportunities, supporting conservation and climate change adaptations for strengthening a just energy transition, and strengthening our bilateral and multilateral partnerships in Africa," said Blyden.</p> <p>"We have seen the SADC region, or the Southern African Development Community agreement members, intervene and – excuse me – respond to the crisis in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. We have seen this also in nearby DRC where the regional leaders of the East African Community are employing their diplomatic and military solutions to bring stability to a conflict, not just using military interventions but also using</p>

dialogue. America is a 3D construct. It uses development, defence, and diplomacy—3 Ds— tools to achieve its outcomes.”

An example of US efforts to improve security in Africa can be seen in Niger. In April 2022 US Africa Command supplied a field hospital to Niger and in Fiscal Year 2021 allocated \$43 million to Niger for peacekeeping operations and military education and training.

In November 2022, the Department of Defence delivered eight armoured personnel carriers (APCs), spares and training to support Niger’s deployment to the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and is procuring 38 additional APCs on a more recently awarded contract. These 46 new APCs are in addition to those previously provided to the G5 Sahel and Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

In the last three months, US commanding general, James Hecker of the US Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa, had visited Air Base 101 and 201 in Niger where, “he met with the Niger Air Chief to obtain situational awareness from the Niger Armed Forces’ perspective on the threats in the area and discussed the partnership between nations,” according to the US Africa Command website. “Each installation briefed Hecker on force protection along with a perimeter tour to better understand the installation’s significant improvements as well as ongoing challenges.”

The US in January handed over the last of three surplus C-130 Hercules transports to Niger, along with training, spares, and a new hangar.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Congo: extremist’s church bombing kills 10</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-01-15/congo-church-bomb-extremists-suspected">https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2023-01-15/congo-church-bomb-extremists-suspected</a>
GIST	<p>GOMA, Congo — A suspected extremist attack at a church in eastern Congo killed at least 10 people and wounded more than three dozen, according to the country’s army.</p> <p>A group linked to Islamic extremists was suspected of being responsible for a bomb that went off in the Pentecostal church in the North Kivu province town of Kasindi, military spokesperson Anthony Mwalushayi told the Associated Press by phone.</p> <p>A Kenyan national found at the scene was detained, Mwalushayi said. Congo’s government urged people to avoid crowds and be vigilant as it conducted an investigation, the minister of communication tweeted.</p> <p>Videos and photos of the attack seen by the AP showed bodies on the ground outside the church, including one that appeared to be a child’s. The injured were being carried out of the church surrounded by other people screaming.</p> <p>Survivors and witnesses said the blast severed some people’s limbs.</p> <p>Masika Makasi, 25, was sitting under a tent outside the church when she heard a noise that sounded like a tire going flat, she told the AP from her home in Kasindi. Her leg was injured and her sister-in-law, who was several feet away, died instantly, Makasi said.</p> <p>“I am traumatized from seeing people die around me,” she said.</p> <p>Violence <a href="#">has racked eastern Congo for decades</a> as more than 120 armed groups and self-defense militias fight for land and power. Nearly 6 million people are internally displaced, and hundreds of thousands are facing extreme food insecurity, according to the U.N.</p> <p>Fighters with the Allied Democratic Forces, a rebel organization which is believed to have links to the Islamic State group have carried out several attacks in Kasindi, on the border with Uganda.</p>



	<p>Troops from Uganda's army have deployed to eastern Congo to try to stem the violence, but the attacks have increased and spread. ADF attacks since April have killed at least 370 civilians and involved the abduction of several hundred more, a report by the United Nations last month said.</p> <p>The rebel group has extended its area of operations to Goma and into neighboring Ituri province.</p> <p>The complex militia problem in Congo has long produced ethnically motivated attacks and fluid alliances between multiple militias with diverse interests, said Trupti Agrawal, senior East Africa analyst for the Economist Intelligence Unit, a research department of the Economist Group, a global media and information-services company.</p> <p>"The church attack will work to further the narrative of [the] eastern [Congo] conflict taking a religious turn," Agrawal said. "It is likely to deepen anti-Islam sentiment in the Christian-majority country, particularly in the eastern provinces where Islamist rebels are most active."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/16 Former Afghan lawmaker killed at home</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/middleeast/afghan-lawmaker-mursal-nabizada-shot-dead-intl-hnk/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/16/middleeast/afghan-lawmaker-mursal-nabizada-shot-dead-intl-hnk/index.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>CNN — Former Afghan lawmaker Mursal Nabizada and her security guard were shot dead her home in Kabul early Sunday morning, according to Kabul police.</p> <p>Nabizada represented Kabul in Afghanistan's parliament from 2019 until the government was deposed by the Taliban in August 2021. She was one of the few female former lawmakers who remained in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.</p> <p>Nabizada's brother was also wounded in the attack, said Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadrán, who added that an investigation to determine who carried out the attack is underway.</p> <p>The shooting took place around 3 a.m., local time on Sunday, according to local police chief Molvi Hamidullah Khalid.</p> <p>Sunday's shooting is the first time a lawmaker from the previous administration has been killed in the city since the Taliban seized power, but there have been signs of a deteriorating security situation in the country's capital.</p> <p>Last week, at least five people were killed in an explosion near the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday, according to police in Kabul.</p> <p>"Rising insecurity is of grave concern," the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan wrote in a statement condemning the attack. "Violence is not part of any solution to bring lasting peace to Afghanistan."</p> <p>Since the Taliban took control of the country, multiple attacks have claimed dozens of lives in the capital.</p> <p>In September last year, a suicide bomber killed at least 25 people, mostly young women, at an education center in Kabul.</p> <p>Earlier that month, six people including two Russian Embassy employees were killed in a suicide blast near the Russian Embassy.</p> <p>In August, an explosion at a mosque during evening prayers killed 21 people and injured 33.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/15 Heathrow uranium seizure terrorism arrest</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/15/man-arrested-on-suspicion-of-terror-offence-after-heathrow-uranium-seizure">https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/15/man-arrested-on-suspicion-of-terror-offence-after-heathrow-uranium-seizure</a>
GIST	<p>A man in his 60s has been arrested on suspicion of a terror offence after traces of uranium were found at Heathrow airport at the end of December, Scotland Yard has said.</p> <p>The man was arrested after counter-terrorism officers searched an address in Cheshire on Saturday, on suspicion of an offence under section 9 of the Terrorism Act 2006, which covers the making and possession of radioactive devices.</p> <p>He has been released on bail until April, the Metropolitan police said.</p> <p>Border Force officers found the radioactive material with a shipment of scrap metal on 29 December. Specialist scanners detected the uranium, which had reportedly arrived on a flight from Oman, as it was ferried to a freight shed, which then triggered alarms.</p> <p>Commander Richard Smith, who leads the Met's Counter Terrorism Command, said: "The discovery of what was a very small amount of uranium within a package at Heathrow airport is clearly of concern, but it shows the effectiveness of the procedures and checks in place with our partners to detect this type of material.</p> <p>"Our priority since launching our investigation has been to ensure that there is no linked direct threat to the public. To this end, we are following every possible line of inquiry available to us, which has led us to making this arrest over the weekend.</p> <p>"I want to be clear that despite making this arrest, and based on what we currently know, this incident still does not appear to be linked to any direct threat to the public.</p> <p>"However, detectives are continuing with their inquiries to ensure this is definitely the case."</p> <p>A spokesperson from the Met said the uranium was found during "routine screening" at Heathrow.</p> <p>Col Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a chemical and biological weapons expert and former head of the UK's nuclear defence regiment, told the BBC on Wednesday that people should be reassured that it was detected.</p> <p>He said: "It's very clear that the comprehensive surveillance network that we have in place in this country, run by the security services, the police and others, has actually worked and picked up potentially a very dangerous containment that could provide a threat.</p> <p>"In this country I think people should be pretty reassured that we're not going to see dirty bombs from this type of material."</p> <p>Asked what could have happened to the metal, he said: "If it is for nefarious reasons, for bad reasons, to create mayhem ... then that is an area of concern.</p> <p>"But I think the key thing is that there are people looking out for this and this should not worry the public unduly."</p> <p>A Home Office spokesperson said: "We do not comment on live investigations."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Burkina Faso: jihadists kidnap 50 women</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/16/burkina-faso-suspected-jihadists-kidnap-women">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/16/burkina-faso-suspected-jihadists-kidnap-women</a>
GIST	Suspected jihadists have abducted about 50 women in insurgency-wracked northern Burkina Faso, local officials and residents say.

Roughly 40 were seized around 12km (seven miles) south-east of Arbinda on Thursday and about 20 others were abducted on Friday to the north of the town, the sources said on condition of anonymity.

Several managed to escape and return to their villages to raise the alarm, they said.

Since 2015 the landlocked West African country – one of the world’s poorest and most volatile – has been grappling with an insurgency led by jihadists affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group that has killed tens of thousands and displaced around 2 million people.

“The women got together to go and gather leaves and wild fruits in the bush because there is nothing left to eat,” said one resident, adding that they had left with their carts on Thursday.

“On Thursday evening, when they didn’t come back, we thought that their carts had had a problem,” another resident said. “But three survivors came back to tell us what happened.”

The same person said about 20 women, who had not known about the first abduction, were subsequently taken the next day, 8km north of Arbinda.

“In both groups, some women managed to escape and returned to the village on foot,” the resident added. “We believe that the kidnappers took them to their bases.”

According to local officials who confirmed the abductions, the army and its civilian auxiliaries have carried out unsuccessful sweeps of the area.

Arbinda is in the Sahel region of northern Burkina Faso, an area under blockade by jihadist groups and with limited food supplies.

The town and surrounding areas are regularly beset by jihadist attacks that often target civilians.

In August 2021, 80 people, including 65 civilians, were killed in an attack on a convoy taking them to Arbinda.

In December 2019, 35 civilians were among a group of 42 people who died in an attack on the town itself.

In many parts of Burkina, crops can no longer be cultivated because of the conflict.

The population of Arbinda is heavily dependent on outside food supplies.

In November 2022, Idrissa Badini, a civil society spokesperson, raised alarm about the situation in Arbinda. “The population, which has used up its reserves, is on the verge of a humanitarian disaster,” he said.

The UN says nearly 1 million people are living in blockaded areas in the north and east.

Disgruntled army officers have carried out two coups this year in a show of anger at failures to roll back the insurgency.

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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/16 Parasites vanishing from WA waters
SOURCE	<a href="https://crosscut.com/environment/2023/01/parasites-are-vanishing-wa-waters-should-concern-you">https://crosscut.com/environment/2023/01/parasites-are-vanishing-wa-waters-should-concern-you</a>

When people think about parasites, the idea of these tiny, wormy creatures often surfaces fear or disgust.

That's not totally unfounded, said Dr. Chelsea Wood, an ecologist at the University of Washington and lead researcher on an unprecedented study about Puget Sound's parasite biodiversity. After all, most people encounter parasites in a medical or veterinary context and consequently can't be blamed for thinking they're all dangerous.

But a new study supports claims that people in Washington and beyond would be smart to care about these wriggly creatures. Results suggest we should worry for them in our warming world — or at least try to understand them better — if we want to preserve biodiversity in our estuary and others.

Only about 5% of parasite species affect humans, Wood said. That segment is critical, experts say, but fear disposes us to ignore the work the other 95% do in ecosystems.

Parasites, especially those that move among many host species, can affect hosts' behavior in ways that help energy flow through marine food webs. A fish slowed by parasitic infection, for instance, is easier for a seabird to catch.

"They're essentially giving this giant assist to the animals that live at the top of the food web," Wood said. Parasites can also keep balance in ecosystems by putting pressure on species whose populations would otherwise balloon.

Wood's team recreated 140 years of parasite population trends by looking for parasites in the guts of eight species of preserved Puget Sound fish specimens collected between 1880 and 2019. They found 85 different taxa of parasites, and expected to find "winners and losers" among them: Some parasites would do better as climate conditions change, others wouldn't.

But instead they saw that as water temperature increased, the populations of parasites within one or two host species simply held steady. Parasites relying on three or more other species to complete their life cycles, which make up 52% of the parasites studied, just nosedived, with an 11% decline in parasite biodiversity every decade.

The findings not only provide a baseline for the decline, but get us closer to understanding which parasites are even here, said Dr. Maya Groner, a senior research scientist at the Bigelow Lab for Oceanography.

"It suggests that there's a lot of interesting biology that we need to learn about," said Groner, who with Wood is a member of the Puget Sound Partnership's Disease Working Group.

The scale of the disappearance shocked Wood. Many people expect that climate change will cause more infections and that a warmer world will be a wormier one, she said.

"I was interested in testing that because we just don't have a lot of data to weigh in on that question, even though we all have kind of this gut feeling that parasites are on the rise," Wood said. "[I think] it says a lot about how much people are paying attention to parasite biodiversity."

"The drops in parasites documented in their paper are eye-catching, and worrying about what they may signal about system decline," said [Dr. Jeb Byers](#), a parasite ecologist and professor at the University of Georgia. Byers, who has written about the need for [better ways to predict climate effects on marine parasites](#), did not work on the study.

Many papers project marine disease increasing due to human impact including climate change, "and yet when we look carefully for evidence that parasites increase in response to environmental stresses, we don't often see it," said Dr. Kevin Lafferty, a senior ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey's Western Ecological Research Center and one of Wood's mentors.

Comparing parasite disappearance to declines that have triggered conservation efforts for species people care about, Wood said, from birds to butterflies to whales, “that’s a scary number.”

### **A study 10 years in the making**

Wood had been wanting to do this research since about 2009, as a Ph.D. student studying the difference between parasite populations in places heavily influenced by humans and those that are comparatively untouched. She realized there are differences, but no long-term data on parasite community composition or abundance through which to understand the results.

But a conversation with a mentor turned her attention to pickled fish in natural history museum collections, and the possible pickled parasites housed within them. Wood couldn’t visit aquatic ecosystems of centuries past — but could she attempt to resurrect them in the lab with the help of some well-preserved time capsules?

Pitching her project was an uphill battle. Her technique was unprecedented, and agencies reviewing her funding requests doubted she’d get useful information this way, she said. Historical reconstructions are notoriously hard to do, Byers said — one reason the resulting paper is so novel.

Many rejections later, Wood landed an assistant professorship at the UW. Looking out her office window, she could see the building housing [the Burke Museum’s preserved fish collections](#), and she sprang to action.

In February 2019, a small team began dissecting eight common fish species, including spotted ratfish, Pacific hake and Pacific herring, that museum collections could safely spare for research, looking for trends in the abundance and types of parasites they could find over time.

They collected 17,702 parasites from 699 fish specimens through August 2021, and completed analysis in May 2022. Barring a few very old specimens, museums were eager to lend her fish.

“The Burke is the star of this paper as far as I’m concerned,” Wood said.

The work isn’t glamorous, but creative and resourceful, Lafferty said. “It can be replicated wherever there is a museum filled with dusty jars.”

Picking through fish proved useful. They found temperature change best explained the declines.

Another study that attempted to [model climate change’s global impact on parasites](#) using preserved parasite specimens at the Smithsonian estimated about 10% of parasite species worldwide would go extinct by 2070 due to habitat loss.

“It isn’t to say that it’s for sure climate change — this is an observational study — but that is the most likely suspect at the moment,” Wood said.

Regardless of why parasites are disappearing at this rate, experts say the study is a landmark for providing evidence of a trend in parasite biodiversity loss, and showing that the loss is greater for those species with more complex life cycles.

“The causal reason for it is still a bit speculative. But the fact that the decline occurred is cause for concern, since it likely means shifts on the physical and biological aspects of Puget Sound have been significant,” Byers said.

### **What we don’t know can hurt us — and parasites**

To save parasites, people need to care about them. But [it’s hard enough to rouse conservation sentiment even for things that are really cute](#). Empathizing with something that doesn’t have a face or eyes, is hard

to photograph, and spends its days lying in an intestine sucking up someone else's nutrients or hurting our family pets, Wood said, is a big ask.

"It's a hidden component of biodiversity that people don't care about, either because they've been historically understudied or because they're ugly or slimy," she said.

Putting more support behind data collection could help turn that tide. Ecological data collected and reported in the 1960s and '70s that shows how predators, like the wolves in Yellowstone National Park, are important to ecosystems, Wood said, helped change public sentiment.

"This study is our opening gambit for parasite conservation because ... finally, we have the data to justify all that worry," she said.

With education — especially through infotainment — people's opinions about parasites could evolve from fear to cautious respect.

"I want our Yellowstone moment," Wood said. "We've got Shark Week. It's time for Parasite Week."

Puget Sound is full of parasites people like Wood find not only fascinating, but also beautiful. From [herring worms](#) falling out of recently caught fish mid-filet to species that seem to have disappeared — like *Nybelinia surmenicola*, which cling to sharks' intestinal walls and glisten like jewels — there's a diversity of animals whose health we still don't know much about here.

Wood wants to see more data about parasites to help drive home their value for people who don't see them as inherently beautiful or worthwhile.

With evidence that vulnerable parasites are already declining, time is of the essence for biodiversity: If parasites are disappearing, that may suggest their host species are experiencing change, too.

"Parasites are helping us preserve what remnant populations exist [of other threatened animals]. They're helping us keep food webs together, and they don't get any credit for it. That service is going to be gone when those parasites disappear, and that's when we'll miss it," Wood said.

Science has barely identified which parasites we've already lost and is not close to pinning down the functions they served, she said, but she hopes this study puts us on the path to find out more.

Groner said she thinks it would be wonderful if this information influenced conservation strategies in Puget Sound, or at least resulted in more data collection.

"There's a lot of unknowns about the positive impacts of parasites, and sort of the more-downstream ecological effects of parasitism that we can't quantify at this point," Groner said.

Wood hopes other scientists will conduct similar research elsewhere in the world, so that people can compare parasite diversity globally. She is trying to expand her team's own ability to do this work in other places, to see whether this kind of decline is unique to Puget Sound.

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HEADLINE	01/16 Unprecedented heatwaves to return 2023
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/16/return-of-el-nino-will-cause-off-the-chart-temperature-rise-climate-crisis">https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/16/return-of-el-nino-will-cause-off-the-chart-temperature-rise-climate-crisis</a>
GIST	The return of the El Niño climate phenomenon later this year will cause global temperatures to rise “off the chart” and deliver unprecedented heatwaves, scientists have warned.



Early forecasts suggest El Niño will return later in 2023, exacerbating extreme weather around the globe and making it “very likely” the world will exceed 1.5C of warming. The hottest year in recorded history, 2016, was driven by a major El Niño.

It is part of a natural oscillation driven by ocean temperatures and winds in the Pacific, which switches between El Niño, its cooler counterpart La Niña, and neutral conditions. The last three years have seen an unusual run of consecutive La Niña events.

[This year is already forecast to be hotter](#) than 2022, which global datasets rank as the [fifth or sixth hottest year](#) on record. But El Niño occurs during the northern hemisphere winter and its heating effect takes months to be felt, meaning 2024 is much more likely to set a new global temperature record.

The greenhouse gases emitted by human activities have driven up average global temperature by about 1.2C to date. This has already led to [catastrophic impacts around the world](#), from searing heatwaves in the US and Europe to devastating floods in Pakistan and Nigeria, harming millions of people.

“It’s very likely that the next big El Niño could take us over 1.5C,” said Prof Adam Scaife, the head of long-range prediction at the UK Met Office. “The probability of having the first year at 1.5C in the next five-year period is now about 50:50.”

“We know that under climate change, the impacts of El Niño events are going to get stronger, and you have to add that to the effects of climate change itself, which is growing all the time,” he said. “You put those two things together, and we are likely to see unprecedented heatwaves during the next El Niño.”

The fluctuating impacts of the El Niño-La Niña cycle could be seen in many regions of the world, Scaife said. “Science can now tell us when these things are coming months ahead. So we really do need to use it and be more prepared, from having readiness of emergency services right down to what crops to plant.”

Prof James Hansen, at Columbia University, in New York, and colleagues [said recently](#): “We suggest that 2024 is likely to be off the chart as the warmest year on record. It is unlikely that the current La Niña will continue a fourth year. Even a little futz of an El Niño should be sufficient for record global temperature.” Declining air pollution in China, which blocks the sun, was also increasing heating, [he said](#).

While El Niño would supercharge extreme weather, the degree of exacerbation was under debate among scientists.

Prof Bill McGuire, at University College London, UK, said: “When [El Niño arrives], the extreme weather that has rampaged across our planet in 2021 and 2022 will pale into insignificance.” While Prof Tim Palmer, at the University of Oxford, said: “The correlation between extreme weather and global mean temperature is not that strong [but] the thermodynamic effects of climate change are going to make the anomalies we get from an El Niño year just that more extreme.”

Climate modelling results issued in early January by Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology indicated the country could swing from three years of above-average rainfall to one of the hottest, driest El Niño periods on record, increasing the risk of severe heatwaves, droughts and fires. In December, the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration rated the odds of an El Niño forming by August-October as 66%.

The scale of the likely El Niño was as yet unclear. Prof Andy Turner, at the University of Reading, said: “Many seasonal forecast models are suggesting the arrival of moderate El Niño conditions from summer 2023.” The picture would be much clearer by June, the scientists said.

The El Niño-La Niña phenomenon is the biggest cause of year-to-year differences in weather in many regions. In La Niña years, the east-to-west Pacific trade winds are stronger, pushing warm surface waters to the west and drawing up deeper, cooler water in the east. El Niño events happen when the trade winds

	<p>wane, allowing the warm waters to spread back eastwards, smothering the cooler waters and leading to a rise in global temperatures.</p> <p>Nations bordering the west Pacific, including Indonesia and Australia, experience hotter and drier conditions. “You tend to get lots of droughts, lots of wildfires,” said Scaife, though China can suffer flooding in the Yangtze basin after big El Niños.</p> <p>India’s monsoons, and rains in southern Africa can also be suppressed. Other regions, such as east Africa and the southern US, both of which have suffered recent droughts, can get more rain and flooding. In South America, southern regions are wetter, but the Amazon, already approaching a dangerous tipping point, is drier.</p> <p>“The effects of El Niño could also be felt as far as the northern hemisphere mid-latitudes, with a likelihood of wetter conditions in Spain from summer onwards and drier conditions on the eastern seaboard of the US in the following winter and spring,” said Turner.</p> <p>Palmer said the biggest unanswered question was whether climate change favoured more El Niño or more La Niña events: “That is crucially important for countries looking at long-term adaptation, and will need much higher-resolution climate models. That can only come about with bigger computers.”</p> <p>Palmer and colleagues have called for the establishment of a \$1bn international centre for climate modelling, akin to the Large Hadron Collider that allows international particle physicists to do together what no single nation can do alone.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/15 Wrong turn results in near miss at JFK</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/15/us/jfk-planes-delta-american-faa.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/15/us/jfk-planes-delta-american-faa.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>A close call at Kennedy International Airport Friday night in which an American Airlines plane crossed a runway in front of an oncoming Delta Air Lines plane appeared to have occurred when the American Airlines pilots misconstrued directions from air traffic controllers, radar records and recordings of those conversations show.</p> <p>Delta’s Flight 1943, which was headed for the Dominican Republic, had to abort its takeoff. None of its 145 passengers were injured.</p> <p>The American Airlines plane, Flight 106, bound for London with 137 passengers aboard, was proceeding along a taxiway about 8:45 p.m. when it came near a spot where two runways cross perpendicularly, according to Ross Feinstein, a former spokesman for both the Transportation Security Administration and American Airlines who said he had reviewed publicly available radar and recordings.</p> <p>The Delta plane was waiting to take off on Runway 4 Left, which is intersected by Runway 31 Left.</p> <p>An air traffic controller can be heard telling the American plane, a Boeing 777, to “cross Runway 31 Left,” which would require it to turn right before coming around to line up for departure on Runway 4 Left behind the Delta plane.</p> <p>The American pilot confirms, “Cross 31 Left.”</p> <p>Another air traffic controller tells the Delta plane, a Boeing 737, that it is cleared for takeoff. The Delta pilot confirms: “Cleared for takeoff, Runway 4 Left, Delta 1943.”</p> <p>But the American flight, instead of turning right to cross Runway 31 Left, jogged left then right and proceeded straight across Runway 4 Left as the Delta plane began its takeoff, the radar shows, according to Mr. Feinstein.</p>

In an audio excerpt, an air traffic controller can be heard uttering a four-letter word. One controller orders the American plane, "Hold position!" and another controller says twice, quickly, "Delta 1943, cancel takeoff clearance!"

The Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement on Sunday that the Delta plane came to a "safe stop" about 1,000 feet shy of where the American flight had crossed the runway.

On the audio recordings, after the Delta pilot confirms that he is canceling takeoff, a Kennedy controller tells the American pilots, "possible pilot deviation."

One of the American pilots tries to make sense of what happened, asking the tower, "The last clearance we were given, we were cleared to cross, is that correct?"

The controller responds that the American plane was indeed cleared to cross, but it was cleared to cross Runway 31 Left and proceed on to the start of Runway 4 Left for departure, rather than crossing 4 Left and heading to the start of 31 Left.

"You were supposed to depart Runway 4 Left," the controller says. "You're currently holding short of 31 Left."

The F.A.A. said that the unfolding — and averted — disaster was spotted with help from a system that detects and displays the movements of aircraft and vehicles on runways and taxiways at Kennedy and about three dozen other U.S. airports, using radar and motion sensors.

It declined to provide more details about the episode, which is unrelated to a nationwide problem two days before in which thousands of flights were delayed after a system the F.A.A. uses to send safety alerts to pilots went down.

After aborting takeoff, the Delta plane returned to the gate, the passengers disembarked and the flight was delayed overnight, Delta said. "The safety of our customers and crew is always Delta's No. 1 priority," the airline said in a statement on Sunday. "We apologize to our customers for the inconvenience and delay of their travels."

American Airlines declined to comment on Sunday, saying in an email that it would defer to the F.A.A.

The American flight proceeded on to Heathrow Airport. It arrived 13 minutes early.

The National Transportation Safety Board said on Monday that it had launched an investigation and that it would be taking statements from flight crews, gathering flight recorder information and looking at air traffic control data and expected to issue a preliminary report in several weeks.

Flight recorder information from the American Airlines cockpit might not be available, however: The devices retain only two hours of recordings, and the flight from New York to London takes seven hours. The safety board has urged the F.A.A. for years to require 25-hour recording capacity, noting in a 2018 report that "unfortunately, recent safety investigations have been hampered because relevant portions of the recordings were overwritten."

Mr. Feinstein noted that federal regulations require aircraft operators to notify the safety board immediately in the event of a "runway incursion" like the one that occurred Friday.

"Probably part of the investigation that the N.T.S.B. will look at is why the aircraft decided to depart and if appropriate notifications occurred," he said.

Mr. Feinstein said that Friday's incident was the closest such call he knew of at an American airport since 2017, when an Air Canada jet landing in San Francisco came within feet of striking a plane on the ground.

	“This is very uncommon in the U.S.,” he said, “but the reason why it’s taken so seriously is to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Stray logs turn industrial shorelines green</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/how-stray-logs-in-puget-sound-turn-industrial-shorelines-green/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/how-stray-logs-in-puget-sound-turn-industrial-shorelines-green/</a>
GIST	<p>POSSESSION SOUND — Squinting out the windowed wheelhouse of the ship he’s helmed for two decades, Captain Skip Green spots something several hundred yards in the distance.</p> <p>“See that little black line?” he says, binoculars at hand.</p> <p>A half-mile or so out, it’s little more than a speck on the horizon off Whidbey Island. But it’s also the reason Green, his four-man crew and their 104-foot, 174-gross ton vessel are searching the waters of Puget Sound.</p> <p>It’s a log.</p> <p>A dead floating tree.</p> <p>It doesn’t look like much and it’s not glamorous, but it is a hazard — it could sink a weekend fishing boat, batter a pier or ding the half-million-dollar propeller on a cargo ship carrying 14,000 shipping containers.</p> <p>Green and his team from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are on the water four days a week, tasked with keeping Puget Sound — and its shipping lanes, ferry routes, naval bases, ports and beaches — navigable and clear of debris.</p> <p>They patrol the waters from Blaine to Olympia in the M/V Puget, a World War II-era service derrick equipped with a 70-foot crane to haul logs, pilings, booms and all manner of flotsam and detritus out of the water.</p> <p>The logs enter the Sound on flooded rivers and king tides, washed off banks and shorelines by ever-rising and receding eddies and currents.</p> <p>Once gathered by the Puget crew, most will eventually return to riverbanks and shorelines. It’s a tidy little dance of intergovernmental holism.</p> <p>The logs will help restore tiny portions of our environmentally degraded waterways to their former splendor, nurturing plant life and providing valuable habitat and protection for migrating salmon.</p> <p>In Seattle’s South Park neighborhood, the just-completed Duwamish River People’s Park is the final resting place for 900 of the largest logs Green and crew have collected over nearly a decade. At a bend in the Duwamish, across the waterway from Boeing Field, the Port of Seattle has turned a Superfund site of gravel and concrete into 14 acres of restored marshland and nearly a mile of green, living riverbank.</p> <p>It is the largest habitat restoration site ever constructed in Elliott Bay, and it is anchored by, and built upon, the floating, natural garbage Green and crew have pulled out of Puget Sound.</p> <p><b>“A valuable resource”</b></p> <p>It was a couple of decades ago when George Blomberg, an environmental program manager with the Port of Seattle, saw the M/V Puget out doing its work in the Sound.</p> <p>At the time, the Corps of Engineers would turn anything usable into lumber or wood fuel pellets, but much of the wood ended up hauled off to a landfill in Oregon.</p>

"I saw the snag boat," Blomberg recalled, "And I thought if the Port could receive the material, it would be a valuable resource and they would avoid the disposal costs."

The logs are architectural features in the new downtown convention center and they're planned to be used in the new waterfront aquarium. Some end up as landscaping features at playgrounds or parks. Several dozen Puget-gathered logs were cobbled together to form an arcing wave, in a sculptural installation, SALVAGE, displayed in a South Lake Union gallery last fall.

But most wind up in Port projects, used to rebuild natural shorelines that were lost to industrialization.

The Puget unloads its haul onto barges at the Ballard Locks. The Port then trucks the logs to a vacant lot near the West Seattle Bridge.

Surrounded by a fleet of parked semitrucks, with cranes looming in the background, Blomberg, who has worked for the Port of Seattle for nearly 40 years, inspects recent arrivals. He looks at the logs more with marvel than discernment. Beggars can't be choosers. Don't look a gift log in the mouth.

There are towering specimens, some 80 to 100 years old. Cedar, fir, madrone trees, scabbed with mussels, kelp, barnacles.

He picks up a small, tubular, twisted white shell, the remnants of a marine bivalve that had burrowed into a log, making it home.

"They call them boring clams," Blomberg says, pausing a beat. "They're not boring to me."

(He is less fond of rabbits and geese, which eat the young vegetation planted at the Port's restoration projects. "They're both scoundrels," he says.)

Blomberg will use these logs to re-create a process as old as time, but one that's been disrupted by a century of change and industrialization.

In 1900, the area south of the mouth of the Duwamish River was mud and tidal flats, estuarine marsh, forested wetland, and meandering river.

Today, 99% of that environment is gone, replaced with 80% of Seattle's industrial land, billions of dollars of industry, a massive man-made island, and tons and tons of gravel, steel asphalt and concrete.

Before industrialization, when trees would fall in the Cascade foothills, they'd drift downriver, lodging on floodplains and banks, disrupting river flow, causing new channels to form.

"They would lodge there and form complex environments around them," Blomberg said. "Walk into any native marsh, you'll find logs in it."

They'd provide nutrients for native plants, habitats and protection for salmon smolt navigating their way toward the saltwater.

The distinction is obvious at the new park in South Park. Look across the Duwamish, at the opposing riverbank, next to Boeing Field and the abandoned Jorgensen Forge steel foundry.

The bank is an armored wall of concrete, steel and riprap: impermeable. It offers nowhere for migrating fish to hide, nothing for them to eat as they linger, acclimating to the brackish water.

But at the new park, the riverbank has been brought back to the future.

Crews removed 55,000 tons of old fill material, which had constituted the bank and shore. In its place, they put a grid of 900 salvaged logs, each anchored to the river bottom. The logs are covered in mulch, on

which crews planted more than 30,000 native plants, shrubs and trees: Nootka rose, snowberry, cottonwoods, Lyngbye's sedge, beach grass.

Plants will attract insects, invertebrates, amphibians.

Over time the logs will degrade, but in the meantime they'll form, with the plants, a riparian berm. A root mass will form.

The park is the fifth site the Port has restored, using salvaged logs. There are plans for similar projects at Terminal 25, across from the southeast corner of Harbor Island and at Centennial Park, just north of the downtown waterfront.

"We anchor the logs, we use them as a green shoreline stabilization technique," Blomberg said. "And this is a working marsh again."

### **"Trash lumberjacks of the sea"**

Aboard the Puget, Green has motored across Possession Sound for nearly two hours before he spots that first speck of a log in the distance, just off Whidbey Island's Sandy Point.

But that first log has led to a treasure trove of floating debris. Logs tend to accumulate in clusters, brought together by tides and currents, confluence and convergence.

"It's a little bit of an art form, knowing which way the wind's blowing, what the tides are doing," said Brad Schultz, chief of the waterway maintenance unit for the Seattle Army Corps of Engineers, and a ship captain himself.

At the first log, the crew springs into action.

Two crane operators alternate in the cab, guiding the decades-old, cable-operated contraption. It takes practice, three levers and two pedals — both hands and both feet — to maneuver the 2½-ton steel claw, the grapple, toward the logs.

Luis Hernandez starts in the cab, while Jordan St. John, on the deck, gives hand signals and uses a pike pole — a long pole with a dagger point — to guide the log in.

Up, up, St. John signals. Left, left. Spin, spin. Open.

Hernandez gently sets the log atop the tidy pile on deck. St. John blows him a kiss.

Chain saws are sometimes necessary for the longest logs.

"The trash lumberjacks of the sea," Schultz says.

That first spotted log leads to a meandering road of debris that the ship follows, along the coast of Whidbey, north toward Camano Island State Park, then back down along the southern tip of Camano.

"They just kind of stack up right on that tide line," Schultz says.

River mouths are hot spots, particularly the Snohomish and the Puyallup.

"How about that triple-birder over there," Green radios from the wheelhouse, gesturing at a floating log with three cormorants perched on it.

It is both futile and satisfying.

There will always be more logs. And yet.



	<p>“You’re doing a public service, you can see what you did at the end of the day,” said Green, who left a career as a Navy and commercial diver to work on the Puget.</p> <p>“At the end of the day, it’s just trash,” says St. John, also a licensed captain.</p> <p>“It’s valuable environmental restoration materials,” Schultz counters. “And trash.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Apple Watches in rise 911 calls at ski resort</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/apple-watches-spur-dramatic-increase-in-911-calls-from-ski-resort/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/apple-watches-spur-dramatic-increase-in-911-calls-from-ski-resort/</a>
GIST	<p>Skiers and snowboarders carrying Apple Watches have triggered a “dramatic increase in unintentional 911 calls,” according to the Bonner County, Idaho, Sheriff’s Office.</p> <p>“Last Saturday, nearly 30% of our 911 calls were unintentional 911 calls from people enjoying activities on Schweitzer Mountain,” the Sheriff’s Office said in a Facebook post Thursday.</p> <p>The Schweitzer Mountain ski resort was unaware of that increase.</p> <p>“That’s interesting — first I’ve heard of it,” Sean Mirus, the marketing director for Schweitzer, said in an email. “It wasn’t an unusually active day on the mountain.”</p> <p>Apple Watches and iPhone 14 and 14 Pros include fall detection technology. If the watch senses that the user is moving, it asks for them to respond and sends an alarm message if no response is given, then it automatically calls 911 within 20 seconds, according to Apple. If users are 55 or older, fall detection is automatically turned on. For users as young as 18, fall detection can be manually turned on.</p> <p>Lookout Ski Resort on the Idaho-Montana border has only had one unintended 911 call stemming from an Apple Watch, said Matt Sawyer, the resort’s marketing director.</p> <p>Sheriff’s offices near ski areas throughout the country have reported similar increases in calls, according to news reports. The problem, however, doesn’t seem widespread in the Spokane region.</p> <p>“I think we’ve seen a few in general. But it’s not to the point where we have any concerns over it,” said Rick Anderson, the 911 coordinator for Stevens County. “It’s nothing we even worry about.”</p> <p>He estimates the dispatch center gets a handful of unintentional Apple Watch calls from people enjoying time at 49 Degrees North every month. When an incomplete call does come in, Anderson said dispatchers call the number back. If unable to make contact, they alert ski patrol. Those calls haven’t created a “notable trend,” said Rick Brown, the director of skier and rider services at 49 Degrees North.</p> <p>The Bonner County Sheriff’s Office, which hadn’t returned a phone call by press time, said in its Facebook statement that “our patrol deputies treat each 911 call as an emergency until we can verify otherwise. These unintentional 911 calls can take emergency resources away from true emergencies somewhere else in the county.”</p>
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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 ERPO prevent Florida school shooting?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/us/politics/red-flag-laws-mass-shootings.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/us/politics/red-flag-laws-mass-shootings.html</a>

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Seagull Alternative High School sits behind locked gates and a chain-link fence, a complex of low-slung buildings that provides an academic home for pregnant teenagers and students at risk of dropping out. On a Tuesday in early October, it was a target of the kind of threat that every school official dreads.

“I just might come to yo school and kill everybody,” a 17-year-old who had previously attended the school wrote in an Instagram message to a student, according to police records. He singled out the principal and a behavioral specialist and sent a chilling photograph: a handgun and an assault rifle, splayed out on a bed, with Seagull Alternative High School written across the top of the image.

Informed of the threat, law enforcement officials in Fort Lauderdale moved quickly. Making use of Florida’s so-called red flag law, the police obtained an order from a judge allowing them to remove any guns in the young man’s possession.

Gun safety activists and public health experts say that such orders — often known as extreme risk protection orders, or ERPOs — are a way to prevent mass shootings in a country that has been [plagued by them](#). Nineteen states and the District of Columbia now have red flag laws, up from just two states a decade ago.

Advocates are pressing for more states — including Michigan and Minnesota, where Democrats recently took control of state legislatures — to pass them this year. Only two states controlled by Republicans, Florida and Indiana, have such laws.

Gun rights groups argue that the laws violate due process — the right to have one’s case heard in court. Erich Pratt, the senior vice president of Gun Owners of America, said the laws “don’t work,” citing back-to-back mass shootings in November in [Colorado](#), which adopted a red flag law in 2019, and [Virginia](#), which did so in 2020.

But a growing body of public health research suggests that the laws may prevent gun violence at least some of the time. A recent [six-state study](#) of more than 6,700 ERPO cases found that nearly 10 percent involved threats to kill at least three people.

Indeed, backers say the laws are not being used aggressively enough because law enforcement agencies lack the training or bandwidth to pursue court orders, and many people do not know the laws exist. Congress, recognizing these problems, [passed bipartisan legislation](#) last year that provides \$750 million for state crisis intervention programs, including red flag laws.

“People are quick to say, ‘You have this tool, you didn’t use it, what went wrong here?’” said Lisa Geller, a researcher at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who studies policies to reduce gun violence. “Yes, these incidents still happen. But states are using their ERPO laws in ways that you wouldn’t know about because the shooting never happened.”

There was no shooting at Seagull Alternative High School. The threat and the resulting risk protection order against the former student offer a case study in how such orders work — and why some judges and law enforcement officers are uneasy about them, especially when they involve juveniles.

### **A Tip From a Student**

The investigation in Fort Lauderdale began when a female student alerted a school police officer, who called Detective Cody Campbell, a member of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department’s six-person threat response unit.

Within hours, Detective Campbell said in an interview, he, the former student and the former student’s mother were meeting in a shopping mall parking lot. The detective wanted the young man’s phone and the mother’s help so he could confirm whether her son had weapons. The mother refused, he said: “There wasn’t a lot of cooperation.”

In a brief telephone interview, a woman who identified herself as the teenager's mother declined to comment.

It was a long night for Detective Campbell. "We burned the midnight oil," he said, drafting paperwork asking a court to issue a risk protection order, as well as warrants for Instagram and the young man's wireless phone provider and to search his home.

The requests were granted. But the results of the search were not what the detective expected.

#### Memories of Parkland

Nationally, more than 20,000 petitions for extreme risk protection orders were filed from 1999 to 2021, according to data collected by Everytown for Gun Safety, an advocacy group. A vast majority of those petitions — more than 18,600 — were filed after the 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, a Fort Lauderdale suburb.

Florida — a state controlled by Republicans, who have traditionally been loath to impose restrictions on gun ownership — enacted its red flag law in response to that shooting. Its courts handled more than 8,100 petitions for risk protection orders from 2018 to 2021, according to Everytown.

In Fort Lauderdale, the memory of Parkland is strong.

Detective Chris Carita, who has a master's degree in public health from Johns Hopkins, trains fellow officers in how to use the state's red flag law. On a recent Wednesday, he could be found in a bare-bones classroom with seven new officers.

"Law enforcement is a gun culture; the thought of taking someone's firearms away may not sit well with us, right?" he told them. "That really is a problem for some of us, and so it's important to understand the legal framework for these laws so that you can be comfortable and understand why it's being used and how it's being used."

There are roughly 17,500 state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States; about 85 percent of them have fewer than 50 full-time officers. Many are unable to provide the kind of training available in Fort Lauderdale, said Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a nonprofit in Washington.

Even in bigger police departments, getting officers accustomed to using the orders can be a challenge. In Fairfax County, Va., Chief Kevin Davis has assigned a single officer to manage all emergency substantial risk orders, as they are called in that state. His department obtained 11 orders in 2020 and 26 in 2021. Last year, the number jumped to 80.

Red flag laws are not only used to thwart criminal activity; often, they are directed at someone who is in a mental health crisis or contemplating suicide. Some states allow family members to seek the orders. Two state lawmakers are pressing legislation to permit that in Florida as well.

In two oft-cited papers that helped make the case for the laws, Jeffrey W. Swanson, a professor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University, studied their effects on suicides in the first two states to adopt them: [Connecticut](#) and [Indiana](#). He calculated that for every 10 to 20 people who had guns taken away, one life was saved.

The six-state study found that of the extreme risk protection order cases related to threats to shoot three or more people, about half involved the kinds of "public mass shootings that we all fear," said the lead researcher, April M. Zeoli of the University of Michigan's Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention. K-12 schools and businesses were the most common targets for those large-scale threats.

"The big conclusion is that these really are being used in cases of multiple-victim mass shooting threats," Dr. Zeoli said. "And these threats are largely determined to be credible by judges."

Experts say it is [extremely difficult to predict](#) who will carry out a school shooting. But if there is a profile, the teenager in Fort Lauderdale seemed to fit it; past school shootings have often been committed by young men, including teenagers, who have signaled their intentions.

### **A Search for Guns**

It took less than a day for the Fort Lauderdale police, working with the department's legal adviser, to build a case for a risk protection order in response to the threat against Seagull Alternative High School.

In an affidavit supporting their petition to the court, Detective Campbell wrote that the young man had told the female student over Instagram that he would "kill the principal y he walking to his car."

A background check, the detective wrote, revealed that the former student was facing 13 felony and two misdemeanor charges, including robbery, carjacking and battery, stemming from previous episodes. He had also received a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder, a condition in which patients experience psychotic symptoms, including hallucinations and delusions.

Experts say that only a small percentage of people with mental illness are violent. But the young man had been involuntarily detained eight times for psychiatric evaluation since 2020. In one previous interaction with the police, he said he was "tired of the world and wants to kill everyone," the detective wrote.

Extreme risk protection orders are civil and carry no criminal penalties; as a result, the young man was not entitled to a public defender. That troubles Chief Judge Jack Tuter of Florida's 17th Judicial Circuit, which includes Fort Lauderdale. While he said he supported the state's red flag law, Judge Tuter, who was not involved in the young man's case, said he was concerned about people under 18 who lack legal representation.

"There is a due process aspect to juveniles — there always has been," he said.

With the risk protection order and a search warrant in hand, the entire threat response team, along with a backup crew, parked themselves near the former student's home. Hoping to avoid a confrontation at the front door, the officers watched him leave the house and served him the warrant during a traffic stop.

What they found when they searched the home surprised them. There were no guns. Detectives Carita and Campbell said they believed, but could not be certain, that the young man — aware that he was being watched — stashed the weapons that had appeared in the Instagram picture elsewhere.

That, however, is not the end of the story.

At the end of November, Detective Campbell was called to the teenager's home to respond to an episode in which the young man "was alleged to have discharged a firearm multiple times, with one round ultimately striking his sister in the hand," according to a police report.

After being informed of his right to remain silent, the report said, the teenager admitted to owning and firing the gun that police recovered at the time of the shooting. He was arrested, charged with violating his risk protection order and transported to a juvenile assessment center. The police said that a criminal investigation was active, and they would not comment on how or when the young man obtained the gun.

To Judge Tuter, that turn of events raises questions.

"What good did the risk protection order do," he said, "if at the end of the day, he ended up getting a gun, which he was prohibited from doing; he ended up getting ammunition, which he was prohibited from doing; and he ended up using the gun?"

	<p>The police, however, are convinced that they prevented a mass tragedy that would have been perpetrated by an unstable young man who had a violent past, made a specific threat to kill school officials and students, and apparently had the means to carry it out.</p> <p>“Based on his history, his posts and subsequent events, it’s very obvious that he is capable of violence,” Detective Campbell said. “When a person like that makes those kinds of statements, you have to take it very seriously.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Renton drive-by shooting: 2 injured</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-crime-gun-violence-renton-police-department-chevron-drive-by#">https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-crime-gun-violence-renton-police-department-chevron-drive-by#</a>
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. — Renton police are looking into a shooting that left a 20-year-old and 18-year-old injured on Monday evening, according to officers at the scene.</p> <p>Around 9:50 p.m., Renton police answered a call to a business in the 4000 block of Sunset Blvd. Police say a witness reported that the juvenile was inside their business with gunshot wounds in their lower leg.</p> <p>The shooting took place somewhere within the same block, according to police. The shooter was able to escape, and his car was not identified.</p> <p>The 18-year-old suffered minor injuries, while the 20-year-old is in critical condition.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Arrest in string of Albuquerque shootings</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/losing-candidate-arrested-shootings-new-mexico-democrats-homes-rcna66027">https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/losing-candidate-arrested-shootings-new-mexico-democrats-homes-rcna66027</a>
GIST	<p>A failed New Mexico state House candidate described by police as an "election denier" was arrested Monday in a string of shootings at the homes of state and local Democratic leaders.</p> <p>Republican Solomon Peña is accused of conspiring with and paying four men to carry out four non-injury shootings at the Albuquerque-area homes of two Bernalillo County commissioners and two state legislators, Albuquerque police said.</p> <p>Peña might have been motivated by anger over his November loss, police said. Police spokesperson Gilbert Gallegos said at a news conference early Monday evening that Peña alleged his defeat was the result of election fraud.</p> <p>Pena lost his state House challenge to incumbent Democrat Miguel P. Garcia by 5,679 to 2,033, or 74% to 26%.</p> <p>He took his case to three county commissioners and a state senator — some whose homes were targeted in the shootings — to no avail, Gallegos said.</p> <p>"He had complaints about his election he felt being rigged," Gallegos said. "As the mayor said, he was an election denier — he doesn’t want to accept the results of his election."</p> <p>One of the meetings with local and state leaders became heated, he said.</p> <p>"One actually led to quite an argument, I believe," Gallegos said. "It was shortly after that the shootings occurred."</p> <p>Peña was a vocal supporter of former President Donald Trump, who claimed voter fraud in his 2020 election loss, <a href="#">an allegation that is unfounded</a>. He was photographed during his campaign last year wearing</p>

a red "Make America Great Again" sweatshirt with a stitched, gold-colored signature of the former president.

Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller described the attacks as a product of political extremism.

"This radicalism is a threat to our city, our state, and our nation," he [tweeted](#) Monday. "We will continue to push back against hate in all forms and stop political violence."

Detectives allege Peña paid four other men cash and texted them addresses where he wanted gunfire to erupt, Albuquerque police said.

A key to the investigation, police said, was a traffic stop early Jan. 3 of Peña's Nissan Maxima, driven by a man named Jose Trujillo, who was arrested based on a felony warrant, police said in a statement Monday.

The arrest triggered an "inventory search" of the vehicle, a sweep allowed under law in order to impound it safely, and authorities discovered more than 800 fentanyl pills in the center console, police said.

More crucial to the case were the two handguns found in the Nissan, one of which appeared to have fired shots outside the home of state Sen. Linda Lopez roughly 40 minutes before the traffic stop and 4 miles away, according to the latest police statement.

One of the guns matches the description of one police allege Peña took to one of the four shootings with plans to join in the gunfire, according to the statement. The gun malfunctioned, and he left the shooting to one of the men he hired, police alleged. "Another shooter fired more than a dozen rounds from a separate handgun," police said in their statement Monday night.

In addition, a shell casing found in the Maxima matched those found at the scene of another shooting, an incident outside the home of new state House Speaker Javier Martinez on Dec. 8, police said.

One more casing was found in another vehicle, reported stolen, that police say was used by one of the shooters allegedly hired by Peña. That casing matched to a Dec. 4 report of shots fired outside the home of Bernalillo County Commissioner Adriann Barboa in Southeast Albuquerque, police said.

Another shooting, in which more than a dozen shots were fired at the home of then-Bernalillo County Commissioner Debbie O'Malley, took place Dec. 11 and completes the incidents police say are tied to Peña.

Two other shootings previously believed to have been linked to the case — Dec. 10 gunfire at the former campaign office of Raúl Torrez, who was elected New Mexico's attorney general, and Jan. 5 gunfire outside the downtown law offices of newly appointed state Sen. Moe Maestas — haven't been connected to the suspect, police said at the news conference.

On Jan. 9 police [announced the arrest of another suspect](#) in the case and said they took possession of a firearm possibly used in one of the shootings. On Monday, police said four people aside from Peña were involved, with more charges and arrests coming. The status of the Jan. 9 suspect wasn't clear, and police didn't respond to a request for clarity.

On Monday, Police Chief Harold Medina described Peña as the initiator of the shootings.

"It is believed that he is the mastermind behind this," he said at Monday's news conference.

A SWAT team arrested Peña at his apartment in the Albuquerque area Monday, police said.

It wasn't clear whether Peña has retained counsel for the case. There was no response to an inquiry sent via his campaign site. A company associated with Peña didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.



	<p>The <a href="#">Albuquerque Journal</a> describes Peña as an unsuccessful candidate for New Mexico House District 14, which represents the Albuquerque area's South Valley.</p> <p>The newspaper reported during his campaign last year that Peña has a criminal record. He served nearly seven years in prison for burglary, it said.</p> <p>Police noted Monday night that election winner Garcia unsuccessfully sued last year to have Peña deemed ineligible to serve in the Legislature because of his felony conviction.</p> <p>Peña is described in a campaign email as a California native who completed high school in New Mexico, became a Navy hospital corpsman assigned to Okinawa, Japan, owns a business and earned a political science degree from the University of New Mexico in 2021.</p> <p>On his campaign website, Peña vows a safer future for the state. "I will fight to provide opportunity for the next generation, keep the local economy open, and stop those who wish New Mexicans harm — in any way," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 UN: killings of journalists surged 50% 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/killings-of-journalists-and-media-workers-surged-50-percent-in-2022-un-says/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/killings-of-journalists-and-media-workers-surged-50-percent-in-2022-un-says/</a>
GIST	<p>Killings of journalists and other media workers jumped 50% in 2022, with an average of one journalist killed every four days, according to <a href="#">new figures released by the United Nations</a>.</p> <p>Statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Observatory (UNESCO) of killed journalists released Monday showed that a total of 86 journalists and media workers were killed globally in 2022, a sharp increase from the average of 58 killings per year from 2019–2021.</p> <p>While numbers rose all around the world, Latin America was the deadliest region, with 44 journalists or media workers being killed in 2022. Asia and the Pacific, which saw 16 killings, was the second deadliest followed by Eastern Europe with 11 killings, the U.N. reported.</p> <p>Mexico was the <a href="#">deadliest individual country</a> with 19 journalists killed, the U.N. figures showed, followed by <a href="#">Ukraine</a>, where Russian forces continue to attack, with 10 dead. Nine were killed in Haiti, according to the U.N.</p> <p>While there was a small increase — from 20 in 2021 to 23 last year — in the number of journalists killed in countries in conflict, the general increase was primarily driven by killings in non-conflict countries, doubling from 35 killings in 2021 to 61 in 2022, the U.N. reported. The deaths in non-conflict regions accounted for three-quarters of all killings last year, according to the U.N.</p> <p>"These journalists were killed for a variety of reasons, including reprisals for reporting on organized crime, armed conflict or the rise of extremism, and covering sensitive subjects such as corruption, environmental crimes, abuse of power, and protests," UNESCO said in a statement.</p> <p>Nearly half of the journalists who were killed last year were not on assignment when they were targeted, the U.N. said, and were slain in their homes, while traveling or in various public places.</p> <p>The U.N. noted that the dramatic spike in killings last year reverses what had been a downward trend since 2018, when the U.N. reported 99 killings of journalists and media workers globally.</p> <p>The U.N. also said that the "rate of impunity for journalist killings remains shockingly high at 86%," as journalists around the globe continue to face threats of violence, particularly against female journalists.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Targeted attack Calif. home: 6 killed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/6-shot-dead-california-home-targeted-attack-sheriff/story?id=96461815">https://abcnews.go.com/US/6-shot-dead-california-home-targeted-attack-sheriff/story?id=96461815</a>
GIST	<p>Six people were gunned down at a central California home in what the sheriff called a targeted and likely gang-related attack.</p> <p>Among those killed in the "horrific massacre" Monday morning were a 17-year-old mom and a 6-month-old baby, Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux told reporters. Both were shot in the head, he said.</p> <p>"We do have survivors," the sheriff said, adding that it's not yet clear how they survived.</p> <p>Authorities believe there are at least two suspects at large, Boudreaux said. No arrests have been made.</p> <p>"We believe that this was a targeted family," the sheriff said.</p> <p>"This was very personal," Boudreaux said. "We also believe that it was a message being sent."</p> <p>Authorities "believe there are gang associations involved in this scene, as well as potential narcotics investigations," Boudreaux said.</p> <p>One week ago the sheriff's office conducted narcotics search warrants at the house, he said.</p> <p>Some victims were found in the house while others were found in the street, Boudreaux said. One man who was found wounded when deputies arrived was later pronounced dead at a hospital, the sheriff said.</p> <p>Authorities receive reports of shots fired just before 4 a.m., the sheriff said. Callers thought there was an active shooter due to the number of rounds, he said.</p> <p>"I do have more information but I'm not at liberty to discuss at this point," he said. "We have potential information, which will hopefully lead to potential suspects."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Florida MLK Day event: 8 shot</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/police-8-people-shot-1-critical-florida-mlk-96473195">https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/police-8-people-shot-1-critical-florida-mlk-96473195</a>
GIST	<p>FORT PIERCE, Fla. -- Police in Florida said eight people were shot Monday during an MLK Jr. Day event, with one of the victims listed in critical condition.</p> <p>The St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office confirmed all the victims in the early evening shooting in Fort Pierce were adults, WPBF-TV reported.</p> <p>The shooting occurred at Ilous Ellis Park at 5:20 p.m. during an MLK Car Show and Family Fun Day, which the sheriff's office said was attended by more than 1,000 people, WPBF-TV reported.</p> <p>"Multiple people were shot, it sounds like from our initial investigation here on scene there was a disagreement of some sort between two parties, and unfortunately, they chose to resolve that with guns," St. Lucie County Chief Deputy Brian Hester said.</p> <p>Police said four people including a child sustained non-life-threatening injuries during the ensuing confusion, the station reported.</p> <p>"It was mass chaos, as you can imagine, when shots rang out," Hester said. "There were a thousand plus people here at the event, and as the shots rang out, people were just running in all directions."</p> <p>The sheriff's office said two deputies at the event responded immediately and aided victims, WPBF-TV reported.</p>

	<p>Video obtained by the station showed people ducking, running and hiding behind cars, including a woman running to safety while holding a baby.</p> <p>“It’s really sad in a celebration of someone who represented peace and equality that a disagreement results in a use of guns and violence to solve that disagreement, and that’s what’s really sad to me about what happened here,” Hester said. “And then so many innocent people who were injured or hurt and were not part of the disagreement as well.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/16 Meth foulness closes Colorado library</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/health-denver-boulder-education-methamphetamines-8edbd6e90f1dbbd0cd56930e266bea59">https://apnews.com/article/health-denver-boulder-education-methamphetamines-8edbd6e90f1dbbd0cd56930e266bea59</a>
GIST	<p>ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — For the second time in a month, a Colorado library has closed its doors to clean up methamphetamine contamination.</p> <p>Officials in the Denver suburb of Englewood shut down the city library last week within a couple of hours of getting test results Wednesday showing that the contamination in the facility’s restrooms exceeded state thresholds, city spokesman Chris Harguth said.</p> <p>Other spaces such as countertops also tested positive for lower levels of the drug and will require specialized cleaning, he said. The larger-scale remediation work will include removing tainted surfaces, walls, ductwork and exhaust fan equipment.</p> <p>The city of about 33,000 just south of Denver decided to test for the drug after officials in the nearby college town of Boulder closed its main library after finding meth contamination, Harguth said.</p> <p>It is the latest example of the balancing act urban libraries have to navigate between making their facilities be welcoming to all while keeping them clean and safe. <a href="#">When a rash of overdoses in libraries were reported</a> in the mid 2010s as the opioid crisis grew across the United States, some libraries were equipped with the antidote Naloxone, known by the brand name Narcan.</p> <p>So far it seems library closures triggered by methamphetamine contamination are limited to Colorado, according to spokesman Raymond Garcia of the American Library Association, which is unaware of any happening elsewhere across the country in recent years. The group declined to comment on whether drug use has been increasing in libraries, citing a lack of up-to-date data.</p> <p>Health officials say meth residue can be an irritant, causing symptoms like an itchy throat, a runny nose and bloodshot eyes. But secondary exposure isn’t believed to cause long-term, chronic health concerns, Harguth said.</p> <p>Drug use is not common in the Englewood library, but reports of it have increased in recent months as colder weather led more people to seek shelter there, with only a small number of them using, library director Christina Underhill said. More broadly, the library has attracted more homeless people since fully reopening after closing at the beginning of the pandemic.</p> <p>“We’re very accommodating,” Underhill said. But “there are some individuals who abuse this space and unfortunately put us in this position.”</p> <p>Brenda Folsom, who was picking up her grandchildren from school near Englewood’s library on Thursday, said she has seen an increase in drug use in the area over the last two years, particularly at her local park. She is concerned her 3- and 8-year-old grandsons, who go to the library with their father, and other curious children might pick up needles and other drug paraphernalia in its bathrooms.</p>

“I think if they would clean their restrooms a little more or paid attention to the restrooms and stuff or the people going in there, they wouldn’t have this problem,” Folsom said. In her view, the library should have better security and more frequent checks of the facilities.

Boulder officials suggested that their city’s library closure last month was the result of strict state rules for cleaning up meth once testing reveals it. They also pointed out that standards for how much meth contamination is acceptable were developed with an eye toward homes, where frequent exposure is more likely than in public buildings.

Colorado’s rules are “some of the most conservative in the nation, using an abundance of caution to protect infants and children from exposure,” the city said in a Dec. 28 statement.

The Boulder library has since reopened, but its bathrooms remain closed as crews do decontamination work including replacing fans and vents, spokesperson Annie Elliott said. Once that is done, the bathrooms will remain locked and anyone needing to use them will have to ask a staff member or security guard for access.

The Englewood library has made some changes to help homeless people who go there. An outreach group comes each Monday to offer services like help getting identification, food vouchers and housing, according to Underhill.

However after some library users said they did not feel safe, the city hired security guards last year, she said. It also established a code of conduct with the aim of helping librarians be able to enforce rules.

Englewood also recently increased funding to add more staff in hopes of deterring drug use, according to the library’s website.

“The use of the library has changed,” Underhill said. “More people are coming to use it as a shelter area.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/15 Cleveland home shooting: 4 killed, 1 injured</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/4th-person-dies-after-5-shot-girl-8-critically-17719654.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/4th-person-dies-after-5-shot-girl-8-critically-17719654.php</a>
GIST	<p>CLEVELAND (AP) — A fourth person has died after a shooting of five people at a Cleveland home that earlier claimed the lives of two adults and a teenager and critically injured a young child. A suspect is in custody.</p> <p>Police said Sunday that a 48-year-old man who had been hospitalized in critical condition had died. His 8-year-old daughter, who was also taken to the hospital in critical condition, remained hospitalized, police said.</p> <p>Officers in a police cruiser were flagged down by the 41-year-old suspect at about 8 p.m. Friday and told that five people had been shot at a home in the Brooklyn Centre neighborhood a few miles southwest of downtown, Cleveland police said. The man, a relative of the initial two adult victims, was taken into custody at the scene.</p> <p>Police said two adults and a juvenile were pronounced dead at the scene. The Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office identified the victims as 69-year-old Miguel Gonzalez, 34-year-old Angelic Gonzalez and her 16-year-old son Jayden Baez. The name of the 48-year-old man who later died and his critically injured daughter weren’t released.</p> <p>Chief Wayne Drummond said it appeared to be an isolated domestic incident. The circumstances of the shooting weren’t immediately released. No charges were immediately announced but police indicated that a homicide and felonious assault investigation was opened.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/15 Houston nightclub shooting: 1 dead, 4 hurt
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/15/Houston-nightclub-shooting/6811673833095/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/15/Houston-nightclub-shooting/6811673833095/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan. 15 (UPI) -- One person was killed and four others were injured early Sunday when several gunmen opened fire on a group of people mingling in the parking lot of a Houston nightclub.</p> <p>The shooting began shortly after 2 a.m. in the 5100 block of FM 1960 at Greenwood Forest Drive. Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said in <a href="#">a video statement</a> that "multiple" gunmen arrived at the club by car and fired a barrage of more than 50 bullets before leaving the scene.</p> <p>Two men and three women were injured in the shooting, all of whom were transported to local hospitals where one of them was pronounced dead, Gonzalez said. The identities of the victims were not released.</p> <p>The condition of the other four victims was not currently known, Gonzalez added.</p> <p>With a food truck nearby and the number of nightclub patrons in the parking lot when the shooting happened, Gonzalez described the situation as "very scary."</p> <p>No arrests have been made and investigators were canvassing the area for potential witnesses, said Gonzalez who called on anyone with information about the shooting to come forward.</p> <p>"They can always report the information anonymously," he said.</p> <p>According to the <a href="#">Gun Violence Archive</a>, a non-profit, non-advocacy organization, there have been some 1,700 gun violence deaths so far this year.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/15 SCL: thieves targeting EV charging stations
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/vehicle-charging-stations-targted-by-copper-thieves-electric-tesla-public-seattle-city-light-car-wire-strang-curbide-puget-sound-washington-truck-drive-cable-app-supply-chain#">https://komonews.com/news/local/vehicle-charging-stations-targted-by-copper-thieves-electric-tesla-public-seattle-city-light-car-wire-strang-curbide-puget-sound-washington-truck-drive-cable-app-supply-chain#</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — Metal thieves have found a new target: electric vehicle charging stations.</p> <p>Seattle City Light says it's seen a rash of vandalism. It turns out the thieves are after the copper in an electric car's charging cables.</p> <p>Jenn Strang, Media Relations Manager for Seattle City Light, says this has been a problem on the rise.</p> <p>"Since March of 2022, we have seen an increase of activity where we've have had people coming and removing the charging cables from our public charging stations," said Strang.</p> <p>Seattle City Light says 8 charging stations of theirs have been hit, and they believe it has to do with the copper in the cables.</p> <p>"They are taking the metal and they are turning it in for monetary gain. Unfortunately, the amount of money they are going in is nominal. It's about ten dollars," said Strang.</p> <p>The cost to replace the cables comes at a price tag of about \$2,000 plus about \$500 to have them installed.</p> <p>Jim Fuda, the Exec. Dir. of Crime Stoppers of Puget Sound, says copper theft has been a problem for decades and electric vehicle chargers are just another way for thieves to get a hold of it.</p> <p>"What's a charging cable, anywhere from 6 to 10 to 12 feet, they cut that up in two to six foot lengths, and haul it out quickly, and strip it and go sell it to a fence," said Fuda.</p> <p>Seattle City Light is looking at other ways to stop cable thefts such as increasing security when it comes to access to chargers and a pilot program for curbside stations in communities.</p>

	<p>“Instead of via a charging station that someone would drove up to, it’s something that’s mounted up to a pole and then you have to have an app, so by accessing the app the charger comes down,” said Strang.</p> <p>Several of the stations that were damaged are still offline. Seattle City Light says parts have been ordered but fixing them is being delayed to due to supply chain issues for parts.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/16 Arrest: Italy’s most wanted mafia boss</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/16/italy-mafia-metteo-denaro-arrested/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/16/italy-mafia-metteo-denaro-arrested/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>ROME — Italian authorities on Monday arrested their most wanted fugitive, Mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro, who was detained at a private clinic in the Sicilian city of Palermo after 30 years on the run.</p> <p>Denaro had been on Italy’s most wanted list since the early 1990s and is alleged to be the head of the Cosa Nostra crime syndicate. He had already been convicted of dozens of murders in absentia and faces multiple life sentences.</p> <p>His arrest marks a landmark moment in the decades-long battle by authorities against organized crime. Video on social media showed people cheering in the streets of Palermo, honking horns in celebration and clapping for the Carabinieri police.</p> <p>“A great victory for the state,” Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni said in a statement. She thanked the national anti-mafia unit as well as prosecutors in Palermo for their work.</p> <p>With a reported penchant for fast cars, Rolexes and women, Denaro had built a reputation as the “boss of bosses.” But he had also become near-mythic for dodging authorities. Some informants reportedly spoke of facial surgeries. There were so few photos of him that Italian authorities had to rely on computer-generated images that approximated what he might look like as an older man.</p> <p>The Carabinieri commander, Pasquale Angelosanto, told reporters that Denaro had been seeking to undergo treatment for an unspecified illness at a private clinic in Palermo.</p> <p>The owner and director of that clinic, Stefania Filosto, told the Corriere della Sera that Denaro had been using a fake name — “Bonafede” — and that “nobody could have imagined” the patient was one of the world’s most wanted figures. Filosto said that Denaro had been looking to do chemotherapy.</p> <p>He had been lining up for a coronavirus test when “suddenly armed men appeared,” Filosto told the paper.</p> <p>Italian authorities said Denaro had a hand in two of the most notorious crimes in the country’s modern history: the bomb murders of anti-Mafia magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellini, both of which occurred in Sicily in 1992.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/15 Tacoma police: 3<sup>rd</sup> shooting in 4 days</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271230497.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article271230497.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Tacoma police are investigating a shooting — the third in four days — that left a 16-year-old boy with life-threatening injuries Sunday evening.</p> <p>Police shut down North Pearl Street between North 42nd and 42nd streets at 5:40 p.m., according to a statement posted online. Details about the underlying circumstances were not immediately clear.</p> <p>The boy was transported to a local hospital for treatment, police said. Detectives were investigating the scene for additional information. No arrest has been announced.</p>



	<p>The shooting follows two earlier incidents reported Thursday to Tacoma police. A 13-year-old boy was fatally shot on Tacoma's Eastside shortly before 3 p.m.. A second shooting followed at 7:39 p.m. in the 2100 block of South J Street, reportedly following a two-car collision. A 13-year-old girl was shot in the same area. Her injuries were not life-threatening.</p> <p>The two incidents prompted statements from Tacoma Police Chief Avery Moore, who called the killing of the boy "heinous," and Mayor Victoria Woodards, who called it "a tragic day for Tacoma."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/14 Thurston Co. sheriff eyes domestic violence</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/new-thurston-county-sheriff-plans-to-tackle-domestic-violence-with-new-team">https://www.q13fox.com/news/new-thurston-county-sheriff-plans-to-tackle-domestic-violence-with-new-team</a>
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. - The new Thurston County Sheriff is planning to make some bold moves to tackle domestic violence in the county.</p> <p>With around 1,600 reports of domestic violence flooding in per year, it's just one of the challenges the state's youngest sheriff will face during his next four years in office.</p> <p>At 29, Derek Sanders says some folks have called him the youngest sheriff to hold the office in the state's history. Though he was sworn in about two weeks ago, he still climbs into the same car he was assigned to as a deputy.</p> <p>"My goal is at least once a week," said Sanders.</p> <p>He's planning on continuing occasional patrols in his marked vehicle to keep his finger on the pulse of the community.</p> <p>"Most people just want to hear that their boss is down at the ground level and understands what they are doing," said Sanders.</p> <p>What he lacks in long-term experience, the new sheriff says he makes up for in energy and enthusiasm.</p> <p>"I don't even feel like I should be a deputy," said Sanders. "My trajectory as a kid was not that path. So, I felt privileged just to get to that point and to then end up being a sheriff at 29 is mind-blowing, but that's kind of where my passion comes from."</p> <p>Sanders childhood was marked by adversity. His family often struggled in poverty and suffered the impacts of domestic violence and homelessness. He was forced to flee to shelters or hotels with his sister and mom when his stepfather became abusive.</p> <p>When he was eight, Sanders participated in the Shop With a Cop program around the holidays, and it left a big impression.</p> <p>"We were homeless in Colorado and I got to basically participate in that event, and it was a pretty tumultuous time in my life, obviously. We were back and forth between a shelter and a van that a church had donated to us," he said.</p> <p>When he joined the Lacey Police Department as a Community Service Officer, he again participated in the Shop With a Cop Program, this time helping other children to shop around the holidays. He hopes to bring that program to Thurston County.</p> <p>"My goal as sheriff is to really focus on programs that could actually impact the community," said Sanders.</p> <p>He also plans to tackle the same domestic violence issues he experienced last year. In Thurston County, it was reported that deputies responded to around 1,600 domestic violence calls, equaling about four a day.</p>

Those resulted in more than 760 reports, 535 misdemeanor arrest/referrals and 150-200 felony arrest/referrals with two reported homicides.

On the condition of union negotiations, Sanders says in 2023, his top priority will be to create a trained domestic violence team in the Patrol Bureau, with a goal of adding two DV Response Deputies per year, for a total of eight after four years.

"The idea is they can go to court, they can build relationships with the victims, so there is actually a more personable interaction there," said Sanders.

At the Corrections Bureau, Sanders would also like to add two K-9 positions with a goal of no overdose deaths in the jail.

Additionally, he hopes to phase in a reopening of the jail, related to booking restrictions.

"Phasing a reopening of our jail as far as our booking restrictions. So the first thing I wanted to do, a huge complaint from the cities, is we need to be able to book our burglary suspects. I'm like, 'I agree'," said Sanders. "So, we had that conversation, and we decided it was appropriate to relax that booking restriction on day one, and then we are going to continue working on that rephrased opening."

He says while it may be a lofty goal he says, "My hope in the next year, we can actually get to the point where Thurston County jail is up and running."

As for the homeless crisis in Thurston County, Sanders, who as a child sometimes stayed in shelters due to domestic violence in the home, has some ideas on how to handle that as well.

"So, my approach on homelessness, is, can actually be like, simplified pretty easily, nothing in law enforcement can be accomplished without a balance of compassion and enforcement, nothing," says Sanders. "If you go too far either direction, it fails. We see it over and over again. It's set in stone. It's not something that's up really even for debate."

He says he's proposing a balance of enforcement and compassion to get people into house and remove camps from the county.

"If all you do is show compassion, you see a festering problem continue to grow. If all you do is use enforcement, then you are just a heavy-handed, tyrannical government that goes around and bullies anyone that you see unfit," said Sanders. "I know that Thurston County has gotten a lot of money for the state for like, corridor cleanup and things like that."

In the future, he says he'd like to institute a Homeless Outreach Program Engagement Team program, known as HOPE.

"We are going to be asking for two deputy positions for that. Next year is probably the goal to space some of these things out. The process is simple. We will pair these two deputies up with social workers, who have all the resources in the world. It's a team effort, because you have enforcement and you have compassion. And you have to bring those two things together and offer these people who are homeless, something viable.

He says the HOPE team would go into camps to do outreach and offer assistance for a period of time before enforcement would begin.

"The first thing we do for two straight weeks is we document who we are talking to, and we offer them resources."

"We just continue to offer them resources, familiar faces. You have the got the same deputy, the same social worker each day, trying to get these people into sustainable house.

	<p>Once we get to that point in time where we feel confident this person is not taking the help, and it has been there a couple of weeks, now the enforcement comes in. 'Listen, we offered you help. You are trespassing. You are urinating in front of kids. You are littering everywhere. You are going to jail.' Once you get to the jail, we'll offer you more help. When you get out of jail, we will be back at your camp."</p> <p>He said the team would continue that process as many times as needed until something different happens. "One, they leave, because this isn't the place to be homeless, or two, they take the help, and we are hoping that number two is what occurs. That is the model I think is the only way we are going to get around this homeless stuff."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/14 Seattle Pike, Pine area shooting: 3 injured</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/three-men-found-shot-in-seattles-pike-pine-neighborhood/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/three-men-found-shot-in-seattles-pike-pine-neighborhood/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Seattle police responding to a report of a person shot early Saturday in the 900 block of East Pike Street found three men shot.</p> <p>Officers found the three, all in their late 20s, with wounds to their lower bodies, according to police. The injuries were not considered life-threatening.</p> <p>The men were taken to Harborview Medical Center.</p> <p>Kerry Martinek, general manager of the Comet Tavern, said one bullet went through a window into the tavern, but that nobody inside was struck. She was not at the bar during the shooting, which happened around 12:30 a.m., but received reports from employees afterward.</p> <p>Two of the victims were wounded on the sidewalk outside of the tavern, she said. Martinek didn't know where the third victim was during the shooting.</p> <p>It was a typically busy Friday night, with a Beyoncé dance event at nearby Neumos and people milling on the sidewalks, she said.</p> <p>"Obviously people are really shaken up," Martinek said Saturday afternoon. "I'm more mad than anything right now. This is our neighborhood, and it sucks."</p> <p>Officers recovered spent shell casings and found bullet-hole damage to businesses and vehicles in the area.</p> <p>Police did not immediately make any arrests.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/13 Puget Sound area: 5 shootings in 24hrs</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3779465/puget-sound-region-five-shootings-24-hours/">https://mynorthwest.com/3779465/puget-sound-region-five-shootings-24-hours/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>The Puget Sound area got hit with five shootings on Thursday, two of them deadly.</p> <p>One person was shot at a Renton grocery store, and a short time later, an employee of a Kia dealership was shot in his workplace parking lot.</p> <p>The person shot in Renton was hit several times and taken to the hospital in critical condition.</p> <p>The employee of the Kia dealership was also hit multiple times.</p> <p>Later, there was another shooting in SeaTac at 160th Street.</p> <p>A gold-colored SUV was described by witnesses at the shootings.</p>

When the SUV was stopped on Interstate 5 near the Tacoma Dome, a suspect was taken into custody by King County Sheriff's Deputies.

"The officers that were there were in unmarked vehicles, so they were able to follow at a safe distance and able just to follow and monitor the vehicle, so there were no excessive speeds and nothing that gave them any indication that they were being followed," King County Sheriff's Sgt. Corbet Ford told KIRO 7.

#### **14-year-old killed in Tacoma**

Also, Thursday, a 14-year-old boy was shot and killed in Tacoma.

Police are looking for a suspect in the shooting that happened at 40th and Portland Ave. E.

Officers arrived within minutes and found a juvenile male victim who had been shot. Tacoma Fire Department medics took him to an area hospital where he died from his injuries.

The case is being investigated as a homicide, police said.

Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards [issued the following statement](#) on the shooting:

*This is a tragic day for Tacoma. Our hearts go out to the family and loved ones of the young male victim who was struck by gunfire this afternoon along Portland Avenue in East Tacoma. We offer our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones, as well as others grieving across our entire community. Although any loss of life is unacceptable, it is even more painful when we see a young life cut short. As we have stated in the past, we remain committed to working with our local, regional and national partners to reverse the alarming upward trend of violence that we have seen in recent years. While that may not be comforting in this moment, we must continue our efforts to address the root causes of these issues. The Tacoma Police Department has already begun working to identify, locate and apprehend the shooter, and they will share updates on this evolving situation as they become available."*

#### **Body found at Auburn apartment complex**

In yet another incident, Auburn police found a man shot dead in the parking lot of an apartment complex. Officers responded to the Copper Gate Apartment Complex in the 4700 Block of Auburn Way N. just before 9 p.m.

When officers arrived at the scene, they found a male victim lying in the parking lot with at least one gunshot wound.

Officers tried performing life-saving measures, but the victim was pronounced dead at the scene.

Auburn Police believe there is no threat to the community as the two parties involved likely knew each other.

APD is looking for the suspect, but that person is not currently in custody.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/13 Drive-by shootings increase in Spokane</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/spokane-shootings-2022/293-f0f888f3-3cad-4231-9cd5-1055013c22c8">https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/spokane-shootings-2022/293-f0f888f3-3cad-4231-9cd5-1055013c22c8</a>
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The city of Spokane saw a growing number of drive-by shootings in 2022, a trend the Spokane Police Department (SPD) hopes to address in 2023.</p> <p>KREM 2 tracked numerous shootings in Spokane throughout 2022. In some cases, a handful of drive-by shootings happened within days of each other. This became an alarming trend for SPD.</p>

Throughout the year, SPD shared the latest total of shootings within the city. By April 2022, SPD responded to more than 40 shootings. At that rate, the department worried this upward trend would surpass the number of shootings in 2021.

Turns out, it did.

Data provided by SPD shows the total number of all shootings in 2022 was 166, a 10% increase from 2021. In the same time frame, there were 71 drive-by shootings in 2022, a 73% increase from 2021.

#### **SPD Shooting Data: 2019-2022**

##### **2019**

- Drive-by shootings: 28
- Other shootings: 24
- Total: 52

##### **2020**

- Drive-by shootings: 42
- Other shootings: 52
- Total: 94

##### **2021**

- Drive-by shootings: 41
- Other shootings: 110
- Total: 151

##### **2022**

- Drive-by shootings: 71
- Other shootings: 95
- Total: 166

At the request of Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward, SPD responded to the trend by creating a Violent Crimes Task Force. The department also ramped up efforts to arrest felons illegally carrying firearms.

Officer Jacqueline Valencia said they are hoping these efforts will make an impact on next year's totals.

"There's definitely an increase and we're not going to hide behind that number," Valencia said. "But we made major steps to put these people behind bars for the acts they committed. We don't know what the numbers would have been if we didn't create these task forces or go after the people who committed these crimes."

In the first week of 2023, Spokane police announced it restructured its staffing. Doing this put 30 more officers on patrol. SPD hopes this will not only put more eyes on the streets but also reduce officer response times.

Data also shows that shootings last year happened all over the city, but SPD said a majority of these incidents were committed by a small percentage of the community.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/13 King Co. juvenile diversion programs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/new-approach-to-king-co-juvenile-diversion-programs-showing-early-success-king-county-crime-washington-seattle-juvenile-division#">https://komonews.com/news/local/new-approach-to-king-co-juvenile-diversion-programs-showing-early-success-king-county-crime-washington-seattle-juvenile-division#</a>
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office (KCPAO) is taking a different approach to handling juvenile offenders by diverting some cases to community programs instead of the courts.</p> <p>Prosecutors said research has shown this approach has greater success in cutting down on crime, and they're already seeing remarkable success. Over the last 20 years, juvenile prosecutors in King County say their case referrals have reduced by over 90% with the help of these diversion programs.</p>

Prosecutors said while violent crime offenses among kids are up, the overall amount of juvenile offenders has been going down.

"It's not a slap on the wrist," KCPAO Chief Deputy Prosecutor of the Juvenile Division Jimmy Hung said. "It's not a lesser form of accountability."

Over the last decade, Hung has been working on juvenile cases in King County, the approach to kids who commit crimes has changed, and as the program has evolved, juvenile prosecutors are now sending more cases through community diversion than court.

"You can achieve accountability and justice without a courtroom," Hung said, "I can't find anything that suggests that incarceration and formal court processing and giving children criminal history results in better outcomes."

Officials say the cases are generally low-level misdemeanors, like thefts and assaults, and first-time offenders who work with community-based organizations like Choose 180.

Chase Gawiran is a community navigator at Choose 180 who said he comes from a similar background as many of the kids he works with, which has helped in forging bonds and building trust.

"There was a group of people who saw a lot of potential and purpose in me and my life, poured a lot of knowledge, wisdom, took a lot of time and energy to give me this opportunity that I have now," Gawiran said. "I just want to do the same."

Through these organizations, staff connects both victims and perpetrators with resources they need, which could include a variety of things like housing, drug treatment, workshops, and counseling.

"Usually, when you see intent, that you're genuinely trying to help, it kind of softens the heart a little bit," Gawiran said.

"Spending a small amount of time with someone, having them listen, and some said that's the most they've felt heard," Choose 180 Diversion Workshop Coordinator Allie Steinberg added.

So far, they've found it's working. Of those who went through the justice system under traditional prosecution, about 20% re-offended. Of the kids sent to diversion programs during the same period, only 8.3% re-offended.

"Young people don't come out of the womb ready to cause harm," Choose 180 Exec. Director Sean Goode said, "Life happens, conditions, social economics wrap around them that produce environments where this stuff comes up."

Beyond the statistics, progress is seen in the kids who've gone through these diversion programs.

"It gives you a second chance at life," one participant wrote.

"I can get a second chance and have a clean record. Most people wish to be in this class, and I'm so happy I did it," another wrote.

Connecting with kids before they touch the court system.

"If we're able to engage early enough, help them commit to a new direction, give them supports they need to thrive in their academic environment, then it reduces the need for us to be working with young people on the legal side altogether," Goode said.



	Over the last two years, King County has spent \$6.2 million on this. Prosecutors said in addition to being more effective in the long run, this is also less expensive than the costs associated with going through the traditional court system.
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HEADLINE	01/13 Suspect in racially motivated shootings?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-investigating-after-2-injured-renton-shooting/KGVS65IDYFBNNLALAXYHN7CY24/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-investigating-after-2-injured-renton-shooting/KGVS65IDYFBNNLALAXYHN7CY24/</a>
GIST	<p>Three people were shot at three different locations in Renton and SeaTac on Thursday.</p> <p>Renton police arrested a suspect, 32-year old Mamadou Diallo, who is believed to be connected to all three shootings.</p> <p>The first shooting happened just after 1 p.m. outside a grocery store in Renton along Rainier Avenue.</p> <p>The owner of the store told KIRO 7 a man came in, used the bathroom and left. He then tried coming back inside but fell at the door. The owner said he thought the man was having a heart attack, but when Renton officers arrived, they discovered the man had been shot multiple times.</p> <p>The 57-year-old male victim in that shooting suffered critical injuries, police said.</p> <p>A second shooting happened at around 1:40 p.m. at a Kia car dealership on Southwest Grady Way. Renton police allege Diallo drove into a new part of the dealership's lot and shot an employee multiple times. The 42-year-old male victim was taken to Harborview Medical Center and has since been released, according to Renton police.</p> <p>The King County Sheriff's Office also confirmed a shooting on 160th Street in SeaTac just after 2 p.m. A man with multiple gunshot wounds was taken to Harborview Medical Center, authorities said.</p> <p>Officers talked to witnesses at the scene who gave them descriptions of the car the suspect was driving. Deputies used a helicopter to track down the gold Dodge Journey.</p> <p>"They initiated a traffic stop, the individual in the vehicle immediately pulled over and was compliant and was detained without any incident, without any issues," said King County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Corbett Ford.</p> <p>Diallo was arrested in Tacoma.</p> <p>A judge found probable cause for Diallo for three counts of first-degree assault on Friday.</p> <p>Officials said the shootings appeared to be random and "potentially racially-motivated." In interviews with detectives, Diallo said numerous times that he did not like "Black people" because "they always killing each other." All three men Diallo shot are Black.</p> <p>Charging documents also identify Diallo as Black.</p> <p>Prosecutors argued that Diallo is a danger to the community and asked for his bail to be set at \$5 million. A judge ultimately set bail at \$3 million.</p>
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